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ABSTRACT

This monograph was written to accompany a four-part inservice training program for early childhood educators and caretakers in Maine concerning behavioral problems in early childhood settings. It was developed as part of the LEARNS Early Childhood program, Maine's statewide initiative for inclusive education. The focus is on preventing problem behaviors through the creation of environments that build community; emphasize respectful, responsive relations; foster friendships; and teach children to develop skills for peaceful conflict resolution and problem solving. Each chapter is based on one of the program's seminars: (1) belonging, (2) fostering friendships, (3) building peaceful classrooms, and (4) pulling it all together with positive supports. Each chapter includes answers to common questions based on research, practical strategies for implementing the principles identified, and suggested resources (books, articles, videotapes, and Web sites). (Contains 105 references.) (DB)

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Creating Inclusive Early Care Communities

Building a Foundation for Cooperative Behavior

A

LEARNS Early Childhood Monograph

by
Linda Labas
Martie Kendrick
Colette Bilodeau
with
Kathy Son
Theresa Gooldrup

Center for Community Inclusion
Maine's University Affiliated Program
University of Maine
1999

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University of Maine
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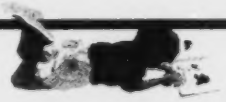
Introduction

In recent years, early educators have become increasingly alarmed by both the expanding numbers of children with severe problem behaviors and by the ever younger ages at which these behaviors manifest. Often the response to this situation tends to focus on behavioral intervention with the intention of developing "quick fix" solutions to complex issues. Not surprisingly, this approach frequently yields disappointing results for all involved. The truly complex issues of life and human behavior rarely respond to simplistic solutions.

Behavior itself does not occur in a vacuum. It is often the person's best efforts to get specific needs met, whether the need is biological, psychological, communicative, or emotional. Behavior is meaningful and communicates needs and feelings that the young child may not currently have the skills to express in a more productive way. It is as individually unique as each newborn's temperament, rate of development, biological rhythms, interests, and needs. The educator's role—to interact, interpret, and "read" the child's behavior — is a crucial one. The responsive adult-child interaction builds trust and confidence, as well as encourages the acquisition of pro-social skills.

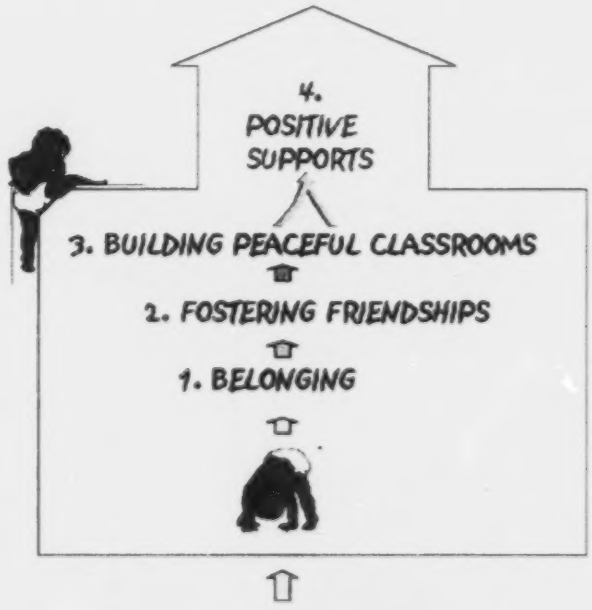
New insights into early childhood development, especially baby brain research, emphasizes the importance of early attachments and the significance of responsive human relationships as having the greatest impact on a child's ability to develop healthy future relationships. Educators who are interested in making a real difference in the lives of young children must be willing to consider "behavior" as existing within a broad cultural context. They will seek to understand who the child is by considering his/her physiological state, experience of the classroom environment, family culture, curriculum, instruction, and relationships. Understanding the dynamic interplay of these factors can lead the educator to a helpful response to a child's behavior that is both respectful and aimed at teaching useful skills.



This monograph was written as an accompaniment to a four-part series conducted by the Center for Community Inclusion, Maine's University Affiliated Program at the University of Maine entitled *Creating Inclusive Early Care Communities*. The series was designed in response to needs identified by the early care and education community in Maine to address the increasing incidence of alarming behavioral issues in their settings. A mix of educational theory, specific strategies, and reflective practice was offered to assist participants in rethinking what they do to nurture and support young children. The focus was preventing problem behaviors through the creation of environments which build community, emphasize respectful, responsive relationships, foster friendships, and teach children to develop skills for peaceful conflict resolution and problem solving.

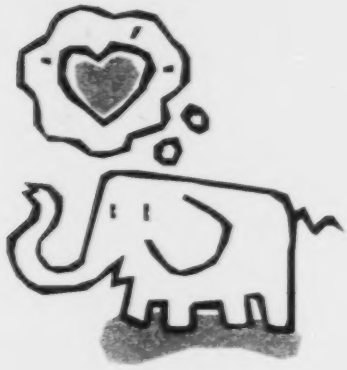
This monograph is an attempt to capture in written form some of the sharing and learning that occurred for both participants and presenters during this four part series. Each chapter is based on one of the series seminars: Belonging; Fostering Friendships; Building Peaceful Classrooms; and, Pulling It All Together with Positive Supports.

The authors have included some essential information, written within a question/answer format, as well as specific strategies intended for practical application in the early care and education setting. We hope that the reader finds the monograph both enlightening and useful.



Building a Foundation for Cooperative Behavior

Chapter One



Belonging

"They never invited the Plain-belly Sneetches.
They left them out cold, in the dark of the beaches.
They kept them away. Never let them come near,
And that's how they treated them year after year."

Dr. Seuss, "The Sneetches," from The Sneetches and Other Stories

Chapter One
Belonging

Belonging is a basic human need. To feel loved, appreciated, and understood is central to the mental and physical health of all people. Both Abraham Maslow and William Glasser, eminent educators and theorists, point to belonging as a critical human need. Maslow's theory of the hierarchy of human needs, for example, explains that all people need certain things in order to grow, develop, and meet their full potential. He postulated that people progress in their levels of need only when each lower level of need is met. Thus, all people would theoretically move from addressing the physiological needs (food, shelter, and clothing) to safety (security/stability) needs, *belonging-love needs*, self-esteem needs, and finally self actualization, where a person would meet his/her full potential (Maslow, 1970).

Early educators would dearly love to see all children entering the doors of their programs ready to learn, grow, and thrive. Yet, in ever-increasing numbers, we see children with disabling behavioral issues that threaten not only their own health, safety, and potential, but also impact the quality of life for all those around them. As a group, early care and education programs do quite well at meeting the first two levels of need, i.e., physiological and safety needs. "What critical human need/s might be going unmet?" and "How does this impact behavior in the early care and education setting?"

In response to these questions, we referenced the "3 R's" of behavior: *RELATIONSHIP, RELATIONSHIP, RELATIONSHIP* (Education Development Center, 1997). For those determined to make a difference in the lives of children, it is critical to understand the connection between negative behavior and the human need to belong and to have meaningful and authentic relationships. The entertainer Billie Holiday said it this way: *"You've got to have something to eat and a little love in your life before you can sit still for anybody's sermon on how to behave."*

During Early Childhood Seminar One, we learned about the fundamental importance of belonging for all children and adults from two internationally known speakers. Bruce Mallory, University of New

Hampshire professor of early childhood and special education and Dean of the Graduate School provided insights into the importance of early care educators' viewing of individual differences among children as resources rather than obstacles. Dr. Mallory shared examples of high quality early childhood programs from other countries and provided information about how different cultures view childhood and respond to childhood disabilities, relationships, and the need to belong. Norman Kunc, a family therapist and educational consultant from British Columbia, challenged participants to think about the ways schools and early care programs can create a culture of belonging for all children including children with disabilities. In Kunc's words; "inclusion is a recognition that schools need to provide a sense of belonging, inclusion means changing the rules of the game so that ALL can play…" Let's take a closer look at the human need to belong…

At what age does the need to belong become important for children?

There is no age at which the need to belong is not important. It is critical from the moment of birth onward. This is highlighted and underscored by the new infant brain research that speaks of the importance of attachment and nurturing relationships on the child's ability to learn and his/her capacity to *regulate emotions* (Families and Work Institute, 1998).

As stated by the experts at ZERO TO THREE: National Center for Infants, Toddlers and Families, "Human relationships are the foundations upon which children build their future" (Pawl & St. John, 1998).

What results when a child's need to belong is not met?

Humans learn through socially interacting with others who have more skills than them. Playmates and companions provide social interaction, support, and enrichment in life, thus contributing to learning and the development of resilience (Education Development Center, 1997).

Social isolation and loneliness, therefore, can have a marked effect on a child's ability to learn, grow, and develop. It can also lead to childhood depression which manifests in numerous behavioral issues.

This is important because adults typically assign a sad countenance or withdrawal to the diagnosis of depression; however, depression in young children may look entirely different, and therefore be overlooked. Young children with depression often present as aggressive, impulsive, and noncompliant. Children who do not develop the characteristics necessary for maintaining social attachments are also more likely to have health problems, emotional disturbances, and personality disturbances in adulthood, specifically, they are more likely to suffer from mental illness, heart disease, and hypertension.

How does early brain research support the need to belong?

For years, there has been an on-going debate about the relative importance of early childhood experiences vs. genetic endowment. Early brain research has now clarified that both are critically important (Families and Work Institute, 1997). The genetic endowment of any child can be either enhanced or diminished by his or her early experiences. Every sight, sound, feeling, temperature, or touch can have a positive or negative affect on the development of the child.

The quality of the infant-caregiver attachment affects the child's development and ability to self-regulate. *Loving connections between child and caregiver actually cause a release of endorphins within the infant's brain which contributes to cognitive development in the child.* Research has demonstrated the brain's remarkable ability to change—but timing is crucial (Families and Work Institute, 1998). Although individuals continue to learn throughout their lifetimes, there appear to be critical periods for certain types of development. For example, the period from birth to age 10 or 11

seems to be the time when the brain is wiring itself for language proficiency.

Since the ability to communicate successfully with adults and peers is essential to the development of relationships (and thus satisfying the human need to belong), educators will want to pay special attention to assisting the child in skill development in this area.

What early childhood models of best practice support the need to belong?

One model that has recently received much attention and acclaim is the Reggio Emilia approach. Reggio Emilia is an internationally recognized model early childhood system in a northern Italian city. Supportive relationships are emphasized in the Reggio program (Elgas & Peltier, 1998).

In this program, children stay with the same teacher for three years, giving the relationship time to grow and develop. Loris Malaguzzi, the director of these schools for 40 years, describes the reciprocity and interaction that characterize relations among children, staff, parents, and community: "Our goal is to create an amiable school—that is, a school that is active, inventive, livable, documentable, and communicative...a place of research, learning, revisiting, reconsideration, and reflection...*where children, teachers and families feel a sense of well-being...*" (Edwards, Gandini, & Foreman, 1995).

Reggio seeks to offer a supportive school community where the needs of all the participants are met: children, parents, *and* staff; and where the needs of no group are considered more or less important than the others. A sense of community is central to the Reggio program.

Another vital core belief is the unique view of the young child. In these schools, each child is seen as an individual with rights, capacity, and potential. Because of this focus on the individual,

the curriculum approach recognizes the "multiple languages" of expression and intellectual performances through which each child expresses their knowledge, interests, and perceptions (Edwards, et al., 1995).

Therefore, in Reggio programs, the preparation of the environment, the curriculum, and instruction is designed with each child's preferred learning style in mind and teachers work in collaboration with children to plan, implement, and document project work. As described by Dr. Mallory during the November 19, 1998 Early Childhood Seminar, all of these features assure that attention to the critical need to belong will be honored and addressed.

What is the connection between belonging and inclusive early care and education?

Inclusive early care and education is grounded in the belief that all children have a *need and therefore a right to belong* in community settings with their age appropriate peers.

In 1993, the Council for Exceptional Children's Division for Early Childhood (DEC) issued a position statement on inclusion that was endorsed by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). This statement read, in part: "Inclusion, as a value, supports the right of all children, regardless of their diverse abilities, to participate actively in natural settings within their communities.... To implement inclusive practices DEC supports: the continued development, evaluation, and dissemination of full inclusion supports, services and systems so that options for inclusion are of high quality."

Lev Vygotsky, an important early childhood theorist who is considered the father of special education in Russia, believed that children learn through socially interacting with others who are more skilled than themselves. *He determined therefore that the greatest obstacles for children with disabilities were created* ***not*** *by the specific disability but by separation from typically developing peers* (i.e.,

by being deprived of their need to belong) (Smith, Miller, & Bredekamp, 1999).

Vygotsky's insights have contributed substantially to our understanding of the sociocultural foundations of development and to the importance of what we now call "inclusion."

How does knowing about the need to belong help me work more effectively with a child with challenging behavior?

Once early educators understand the importance of the "need to belong" for all children they can begin to address planning for these needs within their programs.

The professional may want to begin by examining the child's relationships and considering what might be done to expand these or increase their quality.

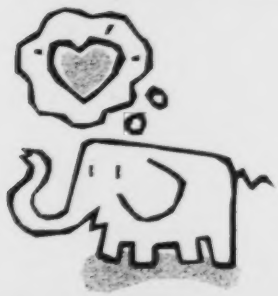
Additionally, each program must be willing to examine its practices and policies to see whether they support or actually undermine a sense of belonging. Norman Kunc, an author and family therapist, suggests that if we were to create a plan for destroying the ideal caring school community, we would have a list of policies and practices that are popular in every school in this country!

These policies and practices (such as competitive structures, and segregation by age, ability, or label) are widely acknowledged as detrimental to children with disabilities. This however misses the real issue, which is that *systems that do not foster belonging for everyone, in truth, foster it for no one.*

The essential task of the early educator then is to work at developing an environment that creates a sense of community (belonging) for all children.

PRACTICAL STRATEGIES THAT TELL YOUNG CHILDREN ...

"I BELONG,



THIS IS A PLACE I CAN TRUST,

I AM SAFE, RESPECTED, AND LOVED"

Belonging, trust, safety, and security are all basic human needs. Early educators can set the stage for building community and a sense of belonging by reviewing their program environment, interactions, day-to-day relationships, and curriculum based on the principles of **developmentally appropriate practice (DAP)** the standards for high quality early care and education developed by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC).

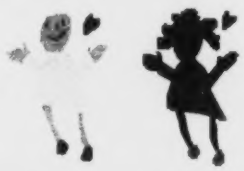
What can EARLY EDUCATORS do?

Rate (review) your program based on the following...

The space tells me I belong because.....

- ❑ The rooms are arranged from a child's eye view... appropriate size, equipment, and toys.
- ❑ Spaces are well defined, orderly, safe, clean, and easily supervised.
- ❑ A variety of places with soft and warm materials, quiet and noisy spots, private spaces, busy places, and tactilely stimulating or relaxing areas are available to provide comfort, security, and reduce stress or encourage active and creative play.
- ❑ Individual children have a place for **their** special belongings (basket, cubby, and locker).
- ❑ The room has a comfortable tone. The overall sound of the group is pleasant, relaxed, and happy, most of the time.
- ❑ There is a generally predictable, consistent routine and daily schedule.
- ❑ There is a balance of active and quiet times, as well as small group, large group, and individual activities.
- ❑ The physical space has different levels of independent access to allow for active choice, movement, and a diverse range of mobility.
- ❑ There are spaces and materials that promote cooperative play (i.e.; block, housekeeping, easel painting areas).
- ❑ Photographs, pictures of familiar people, family members, and relevant activities are displayed at child's level.

- ❑ Time is a planned component of the creative environment. Teachers slow down to allow children to complete activities, direct activities, respond to directions, and interact at their own pace.
- ❑ Books, materials, posters, art and music accurately reflect gender, cultural, age and developmental diversity, and human commonality.
- ❑ Transitions from one activity, place, or object to another as well as from one group or adult to another are well thought out. Advance notice is provided, and cues and supports are given to prepare children with different learning styles for these changes.
- ❑ Each child and parent is greeted when they arrive and depart.
- ❑ Early care educators communicate regularly (daily upon arrival/ departure; through program notes/notebooks; during scheduled parent-teacher conferences, etc.) with families.
- ❑ There are special places for parents to sit, meet, observe, visit with staff, or spend time with their child. Parents are valued and an integral part of the program.



The people tell me I belong when.....

- ❑ Educators create rituals that assist children to enter a program from home, to say goodbye to parents, and to prepare for leaving the program (i.e.; goodbye windows, holding infants when they first arrive, pictures to assist with transitions, calendars, etc.)
- ❑ Educators are assigned to specific children, especially babies and toddlers.
- ❑ Educators are responsive to each individual child, interacting verbally and non-verbally (smiling, holding, touching) with affection, interest, and respect.
- ❑ Educators comfort and reassure children who are hurt, fearful, confused, or upset.

- ❑ Concrete, meaningful, and age appropriate rules are established and consistently followed. Preschool children are included in creating class rules.
- ❑ Each child has a caring relationship with at least one adult in the program. By actions, language, and behavior it is evident that this adult recognizes his/her abilities, gifts, and talents and identifies this child as special.
- ❑ Early educators speak with children at their eye level.
- ❑ All staff use language to expand verbally upon children's ideas, to respond to questions and to address children's needs. Educators become familiar with and use alternative forms of communication (pictures, communication boards, etc) and/or foreign languages when used by children and families.
- ❑ Early educators are alert to the individualized rhythms and sensory needs of each child. Knowing each individual provides the cues for giving one-to-one attention (making eye contact, singing, rocking, reading, and holding children) to provide a positive experience and connection while being alert to signs of sensory overload or a need to stop or change contact.
- ❑ Adults intervene to prevent unsafe or hurtful situations from occurring in the classroom to protect children from abuse, neglect, over stimulation, or exclusion.
- ❑ Work created by the children and photographs of children at work are displayed (at child-eye level) to show each child's contribution and to document program activities and events.
- ❑ Curriculum and instruction focuses on building an early care community. Strategies such as class history charts showing days or months of life in the program provide children with a sense of connection and parents with a concrete way to "witness" their child's early care experiences.
- ❑ The program is designed to provide many opportunities for children to make choices.
- ❑ The program staff collaborates with families in multiple ways to encourage both contributions to their child as well as to the program curriculum and activities.

Sample Activities that Promote BELONGING

★ An educator in a preschool for 3 year olds developed this activity when a new child who was deaf entered the program. Although this activity was developed when a child for whom English is a second language was enrolled, it can be a regular part of any preschool classroom curriculum. It can be used to support belonging and community building as well as the development of literacy and second language skills (Maine's Learning Results goals).

The Activity

One of the ways the "new" language was introduced into this classroom was through the development of a "Class Word Book." Each month the educator made a booklet with new words and sign language phrases that would be used within the classroom. The printed word and a picture showing how to appropriately sign the word/phrase, as well as a picture labeling the word was on each page. The children contributed pictures and drawings to personalize and play an active role in the development of each chapter. Each child brought the "Class Word Book" home so that parents, children, and staff learned the language together. The monthly chapters were bound together at the end of the year and served not only as a concrete product for "graduation," but as a capstone activity for staff, families, and children to celebrate, reminisce, and discuss what they had learned together in preschool.

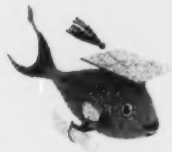
★ An early educator in an infant-toddler program with a goal of focusing on early childhood transitions developed these strategies to give young children a sense of continuity and belonging.

The Activity

As a regular part of her new family and child orientation, this early educator asked each parent to bring in a selection of photos and/or a photo album of their child and family to the new program. In addition to displaying a picture as a collage contribution to "our program community" wall, pictures were hung in specific focal areas (next to the crib, changing table). Additionally in the toddler room a home and family corner was designed with an area for photos/photo albums of each child's family for children to "visit" throughout the day.

*To assist children transitioning from the infant-toddler program into the preschool program, this early educator developed a new preschool picture book with photos, pictures, and simple stories about the new program. Included in the book were pictures of the walkway to the building, the front entrance to the school, the classroom learning centers, and the people in the program (teachers, cook, director, children). This book was part of the program book collection available on the book shelf.

After you've reviewed the belonging strategies above, are there areas in which you feel you're doing well? Forgot about, but now want to try again? Didn't think about until now, but would like to implement? What are your next steps?



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For a complete listing of Reggio Resources

Reggio Children USA, Office for Publications (Carol B. Phillips) c/o Council for Early Childhood Professional Recognition, 2460 16th Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20009 (800) 424-4310/(202)265-9090

"Reggio Children": http://www.rcs.re.it/unita/esped/erchild.htm

For a complete listing of NAEYC Resources

National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1509 16th. St. NW, Washington, DC 20036-1426. (800) 424-2460 http://www.naeyc.org

For a complete listing of Zero to Three Resources

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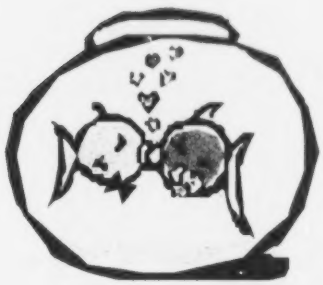
Chapter Two



Fostering Friendships

"Friendship," said Christopher Robin, "is a very comforting sort of thing to have."

A.A. Milne

Chapter Two
Fostering Friendships

From infancy to old age, during good times and bad, all people need friends. A shoulder to cry on, a wink of the eye, a hug, a practical joke, a special holiday provide the connections and shared experiences that make life meaningful as well as pleasurable. Human relationships can be the greatest source of joy. They can also, however, be the greatest source of distress (Allen, 1995).

Most adults can remember a time in childhood when, for one reason or another, they felt like an "outsider." Perhaps they were excluded, the last one chosen for the team, ignored, teased, or otherwise isolated. They also remember how they felt during that period of time. Often these experiences leave scars that follow children into adulthood, affecting their self-esteem and confidence as well as coloring all future relationships. Recalling their own feelings of shame, anger, and isolation at being excluded can provide the impetus for parents, teachers, and other professionals to make a concerted effort to change the dynamics in their settings that inadvertently promote these unhealthy exclusionary practices.

Although friendship is a universal experience, there is little understanding of the phenomenon itself. Why do two people form a close relationship and how does this happen? There is no simple formula, or single pattern that fits every friendship. Some friendships grow between people with similar interests and life experiences; others develop between seeming opposites (Lawhon, 1997). Since the dynamics of friendship are so diverse and complex, we would expect that the educator's facilitation of these relationships would consequently need to be both diversified and individualized.

During our second Early Childhood Seminar, Mara Sapon-Shevin, professor of education at Syracuse University and frequent lecturer on the topic of cooperative learning, spoke on the topic of *Fostering Friendships*. Often when a child has no friends, adults look only at the child as the source of the problem. Sapon-Shevin however indicates both the needs of the child *and* the appropriateness of the environment must be considered.

Although educators cannot change many of the child-attributes that

may present a barrier to friendship, such as neurologically-based impulsive behavior or differences in ethnicity, he or she can address the characteristics of the environment, including physical space, routines and rules, activities, expectations, attitudes, and climate which can have a "make or break" effect on the number and quality of relationships within the classroom.

Sapon-Shevin's latest publication, aptly titled *Because We Can Change the World* (1998) explains why all people need a sense of belonging and provides practical strategies for creating more caring school and early education communities.

In this chapter we take a closer look at the importance of friendship and consider how fostering friendships in the early care program warrants our close attention and best effort.

At what age does the need for friendship become important for children?

The need for friendship is a basic human need from birth onward. Relationship is the mechanism by which the *need to belong*, as explained by Maslow (1970) in his *Hierarchy of Human Needs*, is addressed. There is increasing evidence that while friends are a necessity for all ages, the importance of peer relationships is significant for young children (Allen, 1995). In fact many early childhood experts view the creation of good relationships with peers as one of the most important accomplishments of early childhood.

It is critical that both parents and early educators pay close attention to the developing relationships of young children. In infancy, this is best observed by noting the progressive attachment of the baby with his or her primary caregivers. Making eye contact, talking and smiling, being responsive to the infant's cries, and other cues are the initial steps in forming that attachment, as well as providing the early learning experiences that will promote future relationship building for the infant (Pawl & St. John, 1998).

The importance of the skills necessary to enhance friendship acquisition becomes apparent as the child enters the larger world of preschool. How to share a toy, to ask someone to play, to take

turns, to join a group of other children are the initial skills educators must assist young children to learn (Honig & Wittmer, 1996). These skills provide the foundation upon which friendships and relationships can flourish.

What results when a child's need for friendship is not met?

Vygotsky suggests that young children learn by socially interacting with others who are more skilled than themselves (Smith, et.al., 1999). Playmates and companions provide social interaction, support, and enrichment in life, thus contributing to learning and the development of resilience. Social isolation then can have a devastating effect on a child's ability to learn, grow, and develop (Lawhon, 1997).

We know that challenging behavior often results from unmet needs. David Pitonyak, professor at Virginia Commonwealth University and lecturer on positive supports, identifies six needs that people who exhibit challenging behavior are often missing. The first need is *connections with family and friends.* Of the remaining five needs, three are directly tied to the quality of relationships: *interesting experiences, opportunities to contribute,* and *skills* (such as effective communication) *to enhance chosen lifestyle.*

Pitonyak also explains the outcomes when these unmet needs are minimized or ignored: children become "relationship-resistant;" develop identities as chronic "rule breakers;" believe they have no reason to "behave" or learn; and ultimately develop lifelong patterns of failure and hopelessness (Pitonyak, 1996). Research has also indicated that individuals with few or no meaningful relationships are more prone to loneliness, depression, low self-esteem, and suicide (Lawhon, 1997). Unhealthy early relationships or the lack of consistent, responsive caregiving sets newborns up for the real potential of being at-risk for poor interactions throughout life. Children who miss out on sensitive caregiving have exhibited more behavior problems, are more likely to use drugs and alcohol during adolescence, have lower grades and academic achievement, and have difficulties forming

friendships with peers in preschool and early adolescence (Hawley, 1998).

How does early brain research support the need for friendship?

Current infant brain research has highlighted the importance of human relationships in both the emotional and cognitive development of children (Families and Work Institute, 1998). The quality of the infant-caregiver attachment affects the child's development and ability to self-regulate.

These early attachments form the basis for healthy—or unhealthy—relationship development throughout life (Wolfe & Brandt, 1998). Infant brain research has identified critical periods for the acquisition of certain skills (Families and Work Institute, 1998). Birth to age 10 or 11 is recognized as the critical period for language development. Consider the experience of a child whose language development is delayed. Typical children who try to initiate communication with a child with speech and language impairments are often met with silence. The initiating child often interprets the silence as dislike by the other child. As a result, he or she is less likely to initiate conversation with the other child or invite him or her to play.

Clearly, since the ability to communicate successfully with adults and other children is essential to the development of relationships, the early educator will want to give skill acquisition in this area special attention.

What early childhood models of best practice support the need for friendship?

Early childhood programs built on a foundation of developmentally appropriate practice (DAP) should address the child's need for belonging and friendship. A focus of DAP is the quality of interactions between children and adults (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997). Also, the early childhood approach of Reggio Emilia (see Chapter One) uses relationships as an organizing principle (Edwards, et al., 1995).

In high quality Montessori Schools, warmth, respect, individuality, responsiveness, and positive support characterize interactions among all members of the learning environment. In these programs teachers facilitate the development of children's interactions with each other to provide multiple opportunities for the development of social skills.

Multi-age classrooms are structured to encourage social responsibility, the interdependence of children and positive experiences for on-going communication, peer support, and cooperation (Humphreys, 1998).

Vivian G. Paley, in her groundbreaking book, *You Can't Say You Can't Play* (1992), describes her role as teacher in affecting the social climate of the classroom and the behaviors of children. Paley spoke with her kindergarten class about exclusion and friendship and suggested a new rule: "You can't say you can't play." Her class spent much time and effort exploring the implications of the rule, such as, "Would it be fair?" "Would it work?" "What happens when transgression occurs?" "Can the rule work if only one classroom in the school subscribes to it?"

The journey undertaken by Paley and her kindergarteners illustrates the enormous potential for building relationships that exists in the typical classroom as well as the educator's critical role in making it happen.

Sapon-Shevin and four teachers from the Ed Smith Elementary School in Syracuse, New York, decided to try out the "You can't say you can't play" rule in their own school (Sapon-Shevin, Dobbelaere, Corrigan, Goodman & Mastin, 1998). An important lesson learned from their experience was that children must observe that teachers are totally invested in the concept of classroom community and are available to assist them in working through any issues that may arise. Just repeating or posting the rule was not enough. Children needed modeling so they learned how to ask to join a group, share a toy, or extend themselves to another child.

Group discussions and opportunities to act out ways to approach other children, such as tapping them on the shoulder or saying, "Excuse me, could I join you?" helped children build skills and gain confidence. A significant benefit for children with disabilities occurred as a result of the implementation of the rule. Since all children in the classroom were perceived as potential friends, both teachers and students focused on figuring out *how*, not *whether*, to include these students.

What is the connection between friendship and inclusive early care and education?

Inclusive early care and education is grounded in the belief that all children have a *need and therefore a right* to belong in community settings with their age appropriate peers (Mallory & New, 1994).

Until relatively recently, children with disabilities were often hidden away in hospitals, residential institutions, or regional programs. By virtue of their disability, they were typically excluded from community contact. This was frequently done under the pretext of *protecting* them or based on the belief that they had vastly different needs than typically developing children.

As societal consciousness of disability issues has been raised during the last three decades, we have seen individuals move from segregated settings and into their communities. Without thoughtful planning and strategies to promote acceptance, children with disabilities will continue to be "outsiders" (Cooper & McEvoy, 1996).

Increasingly, children and adults with disabilities are becoming appreciated as interesting, valued, and potential friends and contributors to their communities. Caring inclusive early care communities can address the belonging needs of all children, including those with disabilities. Supporting the acquisition of friendships is an essential first step in this process (Honig & Wittmer, 1996).

How does knowing about the need for friendship help me work more effectively with a child with challenging behavior?

In the first chapter we discussed the human need for belonging. The development of friendships is one essential way that this need can be met. Supportive friendships and relationships are typically lacking in the lives of children with challenging behaviors. There may be many factors that contribute to this, including neurological and sensory issues that can cause the child to be reactive, unpredictable, or unable to sustain eye contact, for example. Other reasons may include temperament, dearth of opportunity, scarcity of good relationship models, speech and language issues, or lack of social skills. The educator will want to address the issues identified as interfering with the child's quality of life/ friendship acquisition. When a child's quality of life improves, so will the behavior (O'Brien & Lovett, 1993).

Although peer friendships are important, a child's first relationship in an infant, toddler, or preschool program should be a caring, responsive adult. The quality of early relationships with parents, teachers, and other caregivers is one of the most important factors in determining a child's healthy emotional development (Hawley, 1998). For children to be "available" for peer friendships, positive experiences with responsive adults influence how children will relate to others for the rest of their lives (Campos & Stenberg, 1981).

Many of the factors listed above are ones over which the child may have no direct control (ex., impulsive, reactive behavior in a child with ADHD). This makes the educator's role in creating an accepting environment that engenders friendship a crucial one. This can be done by addressing the three key influences in attitude formation when setting up the early education classroom: indirect experiences, direct experiences, and the children's primary social group (Favazza, 1998).

Children learn attitudes through indirect experiences such as viewing photographs, books, displays, and instructional programs that provide information about persons with differences. The implications for educators are clear: All children must be represented in their surroundings. Carefully chosen pictures, displays, photographs, books, and play materials can build self-esteem, provide information, and normalize differences.

Children learn attitudes through direct experience (Favazza, 1998). If their experiences with diverse populations are positive this will contribute to acceptance of those differences (Derman-Sparks, & A.B.C. Task Force, 1989). If however the experience is negative, the likelihood of negative attitudes increases. It is therefore essential that both parents and educators provide positive, *direct* experiences for all children that mirror acceptance and inclusion.

Children learn attitudes through their primary social group (Favazza, 1998). Parents, and later a child's teachers, play an important role as the child's first social group in influencing attitudes. How significant adults handle issues of diversity (ethnic, racial, religious, disability, etc.) in the community or early care setting sends a powerful message to the child which can influence his or her perceptions of diversity for a lifetime (Honig & Wittmer, 1996). What they say—or do *not* say—can influence a child's willingness to embrace diversity. Silence can communicate non-acceptance as loudly as willful acts of exclusion.

If educators are to respectfully address challenging behavior they must attend to both the individual child's needs in terms of relationship building and the classroom with an eye to creating a caring, accepting environment.

PRACTICAL STRATEGIES THAT FOSTER FRIENDSHIPS

Even with the best of intentions we can make mistakes. Lessons Learned Include:

- ★Although it is best to be honest with children about the nature of a child's disability, it is best not to give too much information or focus too much on what the child cannot do. Be positive and share the child's strengths, gifts and talents.
- ★ It is best not to assign another child as a peer buddy to a child with a disability unless all children in the room are assigned peer buddies. This practice turns social interactions into a "chore" and undermines friendship development.
- ★Having personal aides attached too closely to an individual child will prevent other children from approaching and therefore discourage friendship development. The notion of aid and fade is a helpful teaching strategy. Aides should be perceived as resources for the entire classroom.

What can EARLY EDUCATORS do?

A Program is Structured to Support Friendship and Pro-social Skills as a Priority Goal When Early Educators...

Rate (review) your program based on the following...

- ❑ Develop warm relationships with children.
- ❑ Understand that social relationships are at the center of all learning and provide the foundation for physical, emotional, cognitive, and language development.
- ❑ Believe that each child has something positive to contribute.
- ❑ Model acceptance and a positive attitude.
- ❑ Have a deep understanding of child development and are keen observers of children's play. Asking and answering the following:
    1. What can adults expect of a child at this age and stage of development?
    2. Is the child engaged in meaningful activity? Alone? Parallel to others? In group situations?
    3. Should an adult intervene, step back, or facilitate a peer connection?
- ❑ Identify the skills, knowledge, talents, abilities, temperament, and interests of each child and highlight common interests among children.
- ❑ Observe and document how each child interacts with peers and adults.
    1. How does the child approach others, and enter play?
    2. Does the child wait to be invited to join a group?
    3. Does the child usually play alone?
    4. Does the child usually seek out opportunities to play with an adult?

5. How does the child communicate needs and wants?
6. How does the child ask for help?
7. Does the child usually ask for help from adults?
8. Does the child ask for help from peers?

- ❑ Provide opportunities for children to interact around shared interests by structuring the activity. For example: provide a toy, materials, or equipment; set up the space; help the children get started by verbally giving instructions; model and facilitate as needed and then withdraw to allow the children to interact together. (Note: there is evidence that when low-teacher-involvement activities, as outlined above, are arranged, children interact more with peers than when a teacher remained and continued to be directly involved).
- ❑ Mediate the environment for children by arranging or rearranging the physical elements.
    1. Does the space send the message that two (or more) can play here?
    2. Do the materials/equipment tell children these are "toys for two" (i.e.a wagon is a cooperative toy, using it to go somewhere requires the help of another child, other materials that promote peer interaction include: sand/water play, blocks, housekeeping, dramatic play and board games)?
    3. Are there duplicates of the same toy?
    4. Do the play experiences seem to foster cooperative or solitary play?
- ❑ Define and clarify rules and roles; cue, coach, facilitate interactions.
    1. For example, shy children may need support to enter a group, teachers can assist children who observe others playing by verbalizing what is happening, describing the group activities, and/or talking with the child about feelings.
    2. Remembering how to wait for a turn is difficult for young children. Using concrete tools such as kitchen timers, clocks, charts with "waiting lists" for various interest centers helps children follow class rules.

- ❑ Use humor to help children enjoy each other (in a respectful manner).
- ❑ Minimize the use of competitive structures, including reward systems, comparative grading structures, and certain competitive games.
- ❑ Reduce the amount of "time-limited" activities to provide free play time for children to plan, organize, interact, and complete their work.
- ❑ Include learning about friendships/relationships as part of the curriculum.
- ❑ Explore the use of affection activities during circle time. For example: Use typical group games and songs paired with an identified physical affection (hug, high five, handshake) to encourage and promote peer interactions. Think creatively about alternative ways of showing affection in consideration of each child's sensory needs and learning style. Songs such as "If You're Happy and You Know It," "Simon Says," and "Hokey, Pokey" are some examples. A note of caution: Children who are uncomfortable in participating, including children with sensory issues or children who've experienced physical or sexual abuse, should not be forced to participate in activities that require physical touch.
- ❑ Utilize cooperative learning structures and curricula, as described through this publication.
- ❑ Use community building activities.
- ❑ Teach children social/play skills (such as how to share, take turns, cooperate, wait, and help).
- ❑ Teach pro-social skills (such as how to resolve conflicts, listen, encourage, provide support, learn to take another's perspective, establish common ground, and be a friend).
- ❑ Teach children group interaction skills (such as how to follow group directions and group rules, speak in turn, stay with the group, wait, and stay in their own space).
- ❑ Cue children to include others.
- ❑ Contribute to on-going discussions with parents, other teachers, administrators, and children about climate issues, rules, policies, or practices that may undermine relationships within the program.

- ❑ Communicate with parents about extending preschool friendships during after hours. Share information about fun activities and community resources.
- ❑ Read and discuss books about friendships and relationships.
- ❑ Incorporate model program structures which support the notion that strong and lasting relationships develop slowly over time. (Use some of the ideas from Reggio Emilia and Montessori programs like enrolling groups of children for the same days each week and the same hours each day, establishing multiage classrooms, incorporating long term project activities into the routine, and assigning core teaching staff to maintain a stable group of children and adults for a period of time).
- ❑ Read Vivian Paley's book, *You Can't Say You Can't Play*.

Sample Activities That Foster Friendship and Pro-Social Skills

Friendship Activities for Circle Time

Purpose of Activity: Provide opportunities for children to expand relationships; learn about their peers; develop appreciation for diversity.

- ★ Play "Find somebody who…" (i.e., has the same color shirt as yours; likes the same TV program; has a Tickle Me Elmo™; likes dogs; has seen Rug Rats™; likes chocolate; hates chocolate; likes going to the dentist; celebrates Kwanza; does not celebrate Christmas; is afraid of the dark; lives with her/his father; lives with grandparents; has lived in another state; goes to temple; goes to church; goes to the kingdom hall; likes to swing; has curly hair; straight hair; dark skin; light skin; has new sneakers; likes the smell of flowers). The teacher can direct this activity based on the needs of the group: get them up and moving around or stay seated in the circle and raise their hands/clap two times/stand up/stomp their feet when something applies to them.

- ★ Adapt songs you know to focus on friendships; commonalties, etc. For example, have the children identify two insects they like (lady bugs and butterflies) and two insects they don't like (mosquitoes and black flies) and insert into the song "We're all a family under one sky, we're a family under one sky. We like ladybugs …we like ladybugs…we like butterflies…we like butterflies…we hate mosquitoes, etc. Then chorus again. This helps children to understand that although we may be very different in some ways, we also have some things in common.

- ★ Read children's books with friendship, diversity, and community building themes such as *The Number on My*

Grandfather's Arm by David Adler; *Sam is My Half Brother* by Lizi Boyd; *Fly Away Home* by Eve Bunting; *Wanted: Warm, Furry Friend* by Stephanie Calmenson; *Are We Still Friends* by J. Barkin; *Will I Have a Friend* by M. Cohen; *That New Boy* by M. Lystad; *A New Boy in Kindergarten* by J. B. Moncure; *Rosie and Michael* by J. Viorst; *New Friend* by C. Zolotow; *Stellaluna* by Janell Cannon; *The Biggest Nose* by Cathy Caple; *White Socks Only* by Evelyn Coleman; *Two Good Friends* by Judy Delton; *Oliver Button is a Sissy* by Tomie de Paola; *Everybody Cooks Rice* by Norah Dooley; *Celebrating Families* by Rosmarie Hausherr; *Anna's Secret Friend* by Yorko Tsutsui

- Designate a "Proud Board" in the classroom. Rather than only posting the "best" work, allow children to select and post their own work.
- Give all children a sticker and have them find another child who has the same one.
- Using a ball of yarn, have the first child hold onto the end and throw the ball to another child. The pitcher must say something he/she likes about the catcher; then the catcher holds onto the string at the point he caught it and throws to another child saying something he likes about that child, etc. Eventually when all the children have caught the ball you have yarn interwoven between everyone. This can be done with a ball also.
- Develop simple graphs that honor children's differences and similarities. For example, color in the number of squares that corresponds with the number of pets you have; place your sticker beside your favorite color; favorite weather day: sun, rain, snow; favorite vegetables, etc. This can be prepared earlier and the contributions of individual children made at circle time.

Adapted with permission from Sapon-Shevin, M. (1999). Because we can change the world: A practical guide to building cooperative inclusive classroom communities. Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.

A Community Building And Problem Solving Exercise

Often there are times in the classroom when the teacher/s are busy and children need help. One way to alleviate this problem and build a sense of community is to facilitate a group brainstorming session with the children to identify useful strategies for these times.

Purpose of Activity:

- Children will develop problem-solving skills.
- Children will become aware of the skills and valued contributions of *all* of their classmates.
- Children will work together with the teacher to build a cooperative classroom community.

Materials Needed:

- large sheet of paper or blackboard for listing/organizing skills
- markers, tape
- poster board for the chart

Directions:

1. Have the children develop a list of all the things that they can do to help with classroom chores or skills that they would like to share with others. Use pictures or symbols to illustrate.
2. Create a chart with illustrations, based on the children's talents that shows which children can assist with what chores.
3. After about a week, ask the question "Did anyone ask you for help today?" As the basis for a discussion with the children about how the chart is working and how they might like to change it. (This provides a basis for ongoing problem solving.)

Adapted with permission from Teaching Young Children in Violent Times Building a Peaceable Classroom *by Diane E. Levin, Ph.D., Educators for Social Responsibility, Cambridge MA, 1994. pp. 124, 125.*

Ideas for Using Cooperative Learning in Preschool Settings

Using cooperative learning strategies in preschool classrooms have been shown to increase children's collaborative problem solving, cooperative play, and social skills. Setting up the physical environment to support small group work is the first step. Next, early educators need to provide opportunities for children to develop the skills to work and play together.

Purpose of Activity:

- Children will develop cooperative-social play skills.
- Children will practice cooperative learning skills within their classroom.

Steps to Implement Include:

- Actively teach children cooperative skills by:

  1. Discussing what it means to cooperate during your class meeting circle time. (What would we see children doing, what would it sound like). Write down their ideas using large chart paper or chart the words on a wall … sounds like, looks like…
  2. Helping children develop a "shared understanding" of roles and rules. This will provide a feeling of predictability and connectedness which is essential for the development of relationships. Small group activities (or a sequence of related activities such as reading a story about apples, visiting an orchard, making apple sauce, and providing related props in the dramatic play center) can provide the social context for acquiring a sense of shared understanding as well as learning the essential social tasks (i.e., sharing, taking turns, understanding the rules of ownership, and how to enter a peer group) that lead to successful peer relationships.

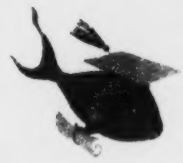
3. Introducing role-playing to teach things like sharing, taking turns, caring for each other, listening and talking as part of a group.
4. Using children's books to provide information and strategies about these concepts.
5. Showing a video that models sharing and taking turns, then talk about it.

★ Practice cooperative learning skills as a regular part of your program's routine and curriculum by:

1. Displaying the cooperative learning behaviors your program agreed to use.
2. Structuring the environment to allow children opportunities to work in small groups and practice skills.
3. Modeling cooperative learning skills.

Adapted with permission from: Liu, C. K. & Greathouse, N.J. (1992). Early experience of cooperative learning in preschool classroom. Contemporary Education, 63 (3). pp. 195 –200.

After you've reviewed the friendship strategies above, are there areas in which you feel you're doing well? Forgot about, but now want to try again? Didn't think about until now, but would like to implement? What are your next steps?



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Chapter Three

Building Peaceful Classrooms

The road grew muddier and muddier, and the wheels began to spin.
"Some of you have to get out and push," he said.
"Not me," said the goat. "I'm too old."
"Not me," said the sheep. "I might catch cold."...
"Not me," said the dog. "But I'll drive if you like."
"Not me," said the cat. "It would ruin my fur."...
The car sank deeper into the mud. They all got out and pushed. They pushed and shoved and heaved and strained and grasped and slipped and slithered and squelched. Slowly the car began to move...

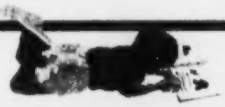
Mr. Grumpy's Car by John Birmingham

Chapter Three
Building Peaceful Classrooms

Never before in our time has so much violence permeated children's every day lives. Young children grow up today exposed to enormous amounts of violence (Carlsson-Paige and Levin, 1998). As Garbarino (1995) shares, children are living in a "socially toxic environment." Children are bombarded with images and real life experiences of destruction and degradation. Messages from the media, including the promotion and marketing of toys, videos, and games, tell children that it's ok to hurt others, that "might makes right" and that competition with others, to win, is the most important thing. While children are exposed and affected by violence to varying degrees, all children are shaped by violence (Levin, 1994).

The effects of this new reality are chilling. Constant messages from birth that tell children the world is an unsafe place have long term effects on young children and their ability to develop healthy social relationships (Levin, 1994). Children are learning that violence is a common part of day to day life - affecting not only their view of the world, but also their understanding of the way people come to deal with each other. Early care settings and schools report ever-increasing numbers of children who act out this violence not only on their toys and games, but upon their peers and their teachers as well (Carlsson-Paige & Levin, 1992). In a climate of violence, children are unable to develop problem solving skills and the tools to resolve difficulties in creative and respectful ways. Images portrayed by toys and TV characters send strong messages about gender, culture, and disabilities. Given children's developmental maturity, these experiences desensitize children to the feelings of others and promote a stereotypic understanding of human differences (Carlsson-Paige & Levin, 1992).

Now more than ever then, teaching children to feel safe and to trust others is of critical importance. Early educators and parents have the ability to impact how much violence children are exposed to and can assist children in understanding the world and developing the skills for interacting with others in constructive and caring ways. It is critical that young children be taught the skills they need to work through their



difficulties and to learn alternatives to the violence in their lives. Through concrete activities and multiple opportunities to exercise the skills needed for healthy and creative play, children will come to experience the positive sides of resolving disagreements and negotiating change (Levin, 1994).

During our third Early Childhood Seminar, Diane Levin, professor of education at Wheelock College and consultant on violence in society and the media and it's effects on young children, provided information about what early educators can do to counteract violence. Through numerous examples and illustrations of classroom activities, Dr. Levin gave participants ideas about how to create peaceable classrooms that help children build a repertoire of alternative behaviors for them to become responsible community members. She described many things that adults can do to teach peace and nonviolent conflict resolution. For example, early educators can invite children into environments that encourage community building and a genuine sense of belonging – places full of rich and rewarding friendships and safe, caring adults.

We can examine what our environments say to young children about violence and what conflicting messages we may be giving children with regard to their play. We can stock up on toys that encourage children to develop a variety of skills, have multiple uses, and provide opportunities for cooperative play. We can devote portions of our curriculum to teaching children problem solving skills and ensure many opportunities for them to practice these in meaningful ways within the daily routine. As important as what we do is what we believe and model to young children. Therefore, we can devote time to examining our own values and beliefs with regard to the importance of making safety, trust building, and peacemaking a core part of our curriculum and forge partnerships with parents to do this work together.

The following information will explore some of the issues and opportunities that exist for young children as they establish relationships with others and develop skills in problem solving and conflict resolution.

What characteristics of young children affect their problem solving skills?

Based upon how children learn and develop we know that children construct ideas over an extended period of time (Britz &

Richards, 1992). This development is not a passive process but a dynamic and interactive one based on unique biological and environmental factors. An astonishing array of influences contribute to each child's understanding of his or her world. Since each child is different both physically and experientially, no two children will have exactly the same understanding of the world in which they live. This explains, in part, why conflict is inherent in human relationships. The educator's role is to teach the children in his/her care to embrace conflict as an opportunity for growth and enrichment (Jones & Nimmo, 1999). Individual differences and the inevitable conflict which accompanies them, provide fertile ground for the growth and development of problem solving skills in young children.

Additionally, young children have distinct developmental features that affect the meanings they construct from their experience, and which are very different from the thinking patterns of mature adults (Levin, 1994). In order for adults to assist children in their problem-solving skills, they must be aware of the characteristics of children's thinking that are uniquely different from their own. The following describes how young children process information. Adults should understand that generally young children:

- **Concentrate on one thing at a time.** When children argue, they tend to focus on only one part of the problem. For example, when two children want the same toy, fairness, friendship, and other toy choices become temporarily unimportant.
- **Are not yet skillful at communicating their thoughts and feelings.** This makes it especially important for early educators to not just tell children to "use their words" instead of their fists or feet, but to help them by teaching and modeling with the actual words they need to use when problems arise.
- **Are self-centered.** Young children are inclined to interpret the world from their own point of view. This feature may make it difficult for the young child to understand the viewpoint of another child or adult, especially during times of stress.

- **Are inflexible, and have black-white thinking.** Young children view the world and the people in it in an all or nothing fashion. They are either friends or foes; right or wrong; good or bad.
- **Learn through play.** Young children learn through active involvement with materials and toys. They construct knowledge about problem solving by observing, interacting with others, investigating objects, and discovering what the cause and effect (touching, feeling, pulling, pushing) of their contact with them does.
- **Focus on the concrete aspects of ideas or experiences, rather than the abstract or less visible features.** When children have conflicts they are apt to focus on the concrete aspects of the problem. Consequently, their attempts at conflict resolution will also focus on concrete actions, materials, and physical features, as opposed to thoughts, feelings, and motivations which are much more difficult for the young child to comprehend. A concept like "aggression" with its graphic visual images and concrete activity is much easier for a child to comprehend than a concept like "peaceable," which has no readily identifiable visual features.
- **Have difficulty in identifying logical cause and effect relationships.** This quality makes it difficult for young children to understand how their actions can affect others. They often cannot foresee the consequence their actions may bring or understand the reactions of others after the fact.
- **Thought processes are static.** Young children will have a difficult time getting from one mental state to another, i.e., they get "stuck." When they are angry, they cannot see past the anger to a time when they will be calm, happy, or on good terms with their current "enemy." (Kreidler & Whittal Trubokawa, 1999; Levin, 1994; Anketell, Dunn, & Sykes, 1993)

These *developmental* features of <u>all</u> young children affect their world view as well as their ability to maintain relationships and engage in problem solving (Britz & Richard, 1992). This underscores the importance of caring, knowledgeable adults who

can give support and guidance during the formative early childhood years. Early educators can assist in this time of growth and development by offering many opportunities for children to try out their own ideas, see how they work (evaluate them), and then adjust them based on what they have learned.

What results when problem solving skills are not developed?

Problem solving skills allow children to express themselves and to get their individual needs met. When a child's problem solving skills are not well developed, the child will have a difficult time getting his or her needs met (Katz & McClellan, 1997). For example, if a child lacks age appropriate communication skills, she/he is going to have a difficult time letting adults know when she/he is hungry, tired, bored, hurting, or needing a trip to the bathroom. She/he may become frustrated and develop maladaptive behaviors in an attempt to get those "unheard" needs addressed. Negative behaviors will, in turn, impact the child's friendships and other relationships. This may lead to fewer opportunities to learn communication and play skills, as other children ignore or avoid him/her. Often, even within the early childhood classroom, children with challenging behaviors develop "reputations" as troublemakers among their peers and teachers. When the child's reputation becomes the accepted *expectation*, it also becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. The young child develops an identity as a chronic rule breaker (Pitonyak, 1996).

Psychologist Wade Hitzing (1992) describes what he calls a "vicious cycle" for the acquisition of challenging behaviors. He explains how children *learn* maladaptive behaviors. The cycle begins with the child's experience of something he or she does not like or does not understand, which causes the child to feel angry, confused, bored, etc. The child may respond to this negative experience by hurting him/herself or others, yelling, crying, destroying property, etc. Then the child discovers that "disruptive behavior works for me." If a caring adult does not intervene to assist the child in understanding his/her feelings and offering alternative responses, the next time something happens that the

child does not like or understand, she/he will call upon his/her own learned repertoire of behavioral response. This almost assures that she/he will continue down the slippery slope of behavioral challenges (Hitzing, 1992).

Therefore, it is critical that early educators TEACH children the skills that they will need to be lifelong practical problem solvers as well as allow them the time and opportunity to practice these skills (Honig & Wittmer, 1996).

How can our knowledge about early brain research inform us about a young child's capacity to self-regulate?

Research about how the newborn brain develops demonstrates the complex interplay between heredity and environment (Families and Work Institute, 1998). In examining the development of the brain, we learn that the brain is "fed" by quality, consistent, nurturing relationships and conversely, stressful environmental influences and erratic interactions cause babies to become "stuck" in a "high alert" state even when the stress, safety issues or danger is removed (Schore, 1997). Babies who develop in this state often have difficulties learning how to quiet themselves, communicate their needs, and form healthy relationships. These experiences can contribute to aggression, emotional immaturity, and behavior problems (Hawley, 1998).

From this research we have also learned that seemingly simple and ordinary early care experiences like touching, holding, feeding, reading, and singing to babies in a way that takes into consideration the baby's cues and temperament and done consistently and sensitively over time teaches a young child that they are secure, safe, worth responding to, and important (Pawl & St. John, 1998). Educators who embrace the development of self-regulation, security, and social competence in young children know that responding to a child when a need is expressed, rather than when they "get around to it" builds trust and confidence. Experiencing these exchanges and seeing similar interactions modeled within an early care setting, gives young children the

opportunities to learn about how to regulate and respond as individuals and later how to interact and relate to others (Pawl & St. John, 1998). Additionally, establishing the climate for developing these early social skills is important. As described by Levin (1994), safety and trust are the organizers for building peaceful classrooms.

Why do children need peaceful classrooms now more than ever?

There are many factors which can help to explain the perilous state in which both young children and adults find themselves today (Levin, 1994).

- *One factor affecting the lives of young children is instability in family life.*

  Many adults can still remember their own experiences of early childhood. Prior to the mid-1960s, major behavior challenges in primary school classrooms were rare. Discipline was often meted out for infractions such as talking in class, running in the hallways, and chewing bubble gum. Conditions in the early care and primary school settings today have obviously changed dramatically. It is not uncommon for teachers, even those with young children, to feel physically threatened or verbally abused by a child in their care. Early childhood staff fear for the safety of all the children in their classrooms and worry about their ability to maintain a healthy environment. More of our young children are living in one parent families, where insecure relationships and insufficient income to provide the necessities of life are typical. Increasing numbers of young children are exposed to substance abuse, domestic violence, physical or sexual abuse, or neglect. For children who live in two parent families, it is often necessary for both parents to work in order to care for the family's needs. Unless the parents are very skilled and have good support systems themselves, this situation can interfere with the development of close familial relationships and can lead in some cases to emotional and spiritual neglect. The consequences for being a less than

perfect parent are so much greater today than in the past (Garbarino, 1999).

- *Another consideration is how the media, culture, and toys influence children and create additional challenges for parenting and caretaking.*

Today, children are being exposed at ever younger ages to horrific images of violence and depravity in the media. Through movies, videos, television, magazines, and the evening news youngsters' understanding of the world is molded and behavior shaped. Some of the messages children receive from these sources include "might makes right"; aggression is the only way for a person to solve a problem; it's okay to break the rules if you're a good guy; real men dominate women; women are dominated by men; trust no one; people who don't look like us are our enemies and therefore it's okay to kill them, and so forth (Carlsson-Paige & Levin, 1992).

Toys can be particularly damaging if not chosen wisely (Levin, 1994). Play is a child's work. Children use play to make sense of their world. Violent toys interfere with the child's ability to make sense of his/her world as well as influence the ways children interact with the world. If the toys selected for children's play are devoted to violent themes and degrading images, this will define the lesson which the child will be learning each time that particular toy is used. Since 1984, when children's television was deregulated, there has been a proliferation of toys marketed directly to children through their television shows (Carlsson-Paige & Levin, 1992). Many of these toys have violent themes and show both men and women in distorted roles. Masters of the Universe™, Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles™, and Power Rangers™ are examples of toys marketed to young children in this way. Each of these toys is designed to be used in *only one way*: in armed or hand to hand combat. They normalize the experience of violence and desensitize a child to the effects of aggression on other people (Levin, 1994). Is it any wonder that our children are demonstrating aggressive

postures, attitudes, and behaviors? This situation demonstrates the importance of government policies that protect children and support parenting and the importance of early educator's role in selecting toys for their classroom. It is very difficult for any parent to resist the plaintive cries of their child who will be the only kid in the neighborhood or program without a Nintendo™ or set of toy soldier figures.

- *Another factor relates to the more limited opportunities children have to actively work out their feelings and resolve conflict through play.*

  With the increased time children spend passively watching TV and videos, the less time they have for active, free play. Because we know that children need to experience direct opportunities to interact with others in order to work out the issues that confuse and frustrate them early educators must structure the environment and curriculum to provide children with alternative ways to experience conflict (Carlsson-Paige & Levin, 1992). Children depend on caring adults to assist them in filtering, screening out, and making sense of the many violent images they are bombarded with each day. Peaceful classrooms provide a safe environment where this can happen and lots of ideas for children to try out and experience how to solve problems (Smith, 1993).

What is the connection between peaceful early care classrooms and inclusive education?

Peaceful classrooms are places where *all* children feel safe and valued. *No child can feel secure in a classroom where all children are not secure.* A sense of belonging that encompasses every child in the classroom is essential to creating a peaceful classroom (Kunc, 1992). Peaceful classrooms and programs that include all children provide an "envelope of trust," protection, and mutual respect. (Edwards, 1992). Children in these environments learn the skills to work cooperatively, socialize, and develop friendships (Smith, 1993). They learn that people are different but that each has contributions to make and ideas to share. They learn that they are safe, can take risks, have opportunities to voice their concerns, and

that they can learn new ways to resolve problems (Kreider & Whittall Tsubokawa, 1999).

In classrooms of very young children, diversity is usually embraced with interest and fascination (Derman – Sparks & the ABC Task Force, 1989). It is not until children begin learning the attitudes of significant others and the society at large that they begin to internalize the messages about differences. Peaceful classrooms honor diversity and offer respect to all children. Unlike much of what is presented by the media, marginalizing and objectifying individuals who are different, peaceful classrooms welcome and celebrate those differences (Levin, 1994). Peaceful classrooms and inclusive education practices share this belief by creating a safe haven where children learn how to participate and live together. They value the creative differences and provide opportunities to embed problem solving within the everyday curriculum (McCracken, 1993).

How does knowing about the importance of peaceful classrooms help the teacher work with young children?

Understanding that children can learn, grow, and develop optimally only when they feel safe and secure provides a frame for the early care educator's work (Maslow, 1970). It also clarifies the focus for all of the educator's efforts, and underscores the importance of building genuine, caring relationships with the children in his or her classroom (Kunc, 1992).

Although there may be numerous factors that challenge a child's growth and development the teacher can be empowered to "make a difference in the lives of children" when he or she recognizes the many powerful contributions that can be made within the context of the peaceful classroom (Levin, 1994). Early educators can use this information to help children within their classrooms by:

- Providing supportive relationships.
- Providing a safe climate so that children feel physically and emotionally safe.

- Working with children to facilitate the development of social, friendship, communication, and problem-solving skills.
- Creating routines and rules, in collaboration with the children, that promotes organization and respect within the classroom setting.
- Modeling acceptance and appreciation for diversity.
- Implementing their curriculum, instruction, and assessment in ways that teachers send the message that all children have skills, gifts and talents as well as needs that will be addressed respectfully within this setting (Forest & Lusthaus, 1990).
- Thinking about the value of conflict and reexamining how practices. Most adults have been taught to avoid conflict at all costs. Most teachers typically respond to conflict by stopping it as quickly as possible through the exertion of power by the stronger individual (teacher) over the weaker (child) (Jones & Nimmo, 1999). For example, the strategy of using time-out to stop children from fighting ends the conflict. While initially it may look like the child has "complied" after such intervention, removal, and time out only serve to interrupt the problem solving process. In the words of Jones and Nimmo (1999), it "...silences the opposing voice **and** whatever wisdom it may carry." This practice does little to guide those involved toward a greater understanding and appreciation of one another's valuable perspective. It also does not provide children with a chance to try out problem solving skills.

Young children both need and desire to build relationships with adults and their peers; however, they are not born with the skills to make these relationships work (Katz & McClellan, 1997). They must *learn* to share, cooperate, collaborate, and resolve conflicts amiably. The peaceful classroom is the ideal place for children to learn these skills for life.

PRACTICAL STRATEGIES FOR BUILDING PEACEFUL CLASSROOMS

What Can Early Educators Do?

Early educators committed to building peaceful classrooms can start by providing children with consistent, caring relationships. Infants and young children need trusting relationships for them to feel safe to explore and learn (Keenan, 1998). These early learning experiences provide a secure foundation for the later, more complex learning tasks of keeping themselves, their possessions and their relationships safe. Learning how to solve problems and resolve conflicts in nonviolent ways gives children the skills they will need as adults. With adult guidance, these skills will empower children to be good collaborators and creative thinkers. The following strategies are offered as ways early educators can promote problem solving and prosocial behavior.

Focusing the Power of Early Educators:

A Problem Solving Strategy for Staff

Sometimes, when early educators think about all the negative influences that are affecting children and families today, they may begin to feel overwhelmed and powerless. They wonder whether anything they do really makes a difference when so many of the factors that combine to form a "socially toxic environment" for young children are out of their control (Garbarino, 1995). It is essential for early care educators to understand the difference between what they can or should control and what they cannot or have limited control over. They must "play on the strings they have." When educators focus on those things they can do something about, they feel empowered to continue and realize that they can make a difference for children. They can also stop blaming themselves and others for things over which they have limited or no control. In order to do this, educators must "activate" their critical thinking and problem solving skills to intervene where they can have the greatest impact.

Purpose of the activity:

1. To provide staff with an opportunity to think about and discuss aspects of their work over which they have control or do not have control.
2. To give staff time to identify how they can refocus their activities toward the things they can control and thus are more likely to experience success and increase the likelihood of attaining their goals.

Materials needed:

- ★ Chart paper
- ★ Markers
- ★ Copies of chart showing areas of more/less control

Directions:

1. During a staff or team planning meeting, distribute copies of the chart showing aspects of early childhood work over which the team may have greater or lesser control.
2. Have a discussion about the chart. Some of the following questions may move the discussion along:
   - ★ Do staff agree with the chart? In what ways?
   - ★ In what ways do they not agree?
   - ★ What is the value of identifying what we have control over and what we do not?
   - ★ How much time and effort do we spend in discussion over those things we do not control?
   - ★ Where will the staff's efforts make the most difference for children and families?
3. Have staff look at those areas over which the team or individuals may have some control. Have staff add to the list. (Record additions or make a complete list of aspects over which the team has some control.)
4. Have staff look at the list of items over which they have *no or limited* control. Have staff add to the list if needed.
5. Discuss together the following:
   - ★ "What items on the 'things we can control" list could be used to address the items on the 'things we can't control' list?"

     For example, a child returns to your child care program the day after her house burned and her pet cat died. The staff have no control over this disaster, HOWEVER, ... staff can address the emotional needs of this young child by: providing individual time for physical comfort and reassurance, providing opportunities for her to talk about the tragedy, providing relevant books to aide in helping her cope; providing art materials and opportunities to draw and create to express feelings etc. *all* of which are within their control (Farish, 1995).

     Another example: a single parent is not doing what the staff feels needs to be done for a child, a condition over

which they have no or limited control. Rather than blaming the parent, who is probably doing the best she can given her past and present circumstances, the staff might consider their own role in building a trusting relationship with the person; reconsider whether their expectations for the person are realistic given family capacity and resources; consider additional family resources to support the parent in meeting the child's need; and make the child's experience in the early care setting as positive and productive as possible.

- ★ What one area on the "things we can control list" can we begin working on? List possible solutions and steps.
- ★ Have a discussion about the following: "How can we stay focused on the aspects of our work over which we have some control?"

6. List the team's suggestions.
7. Review with staff periodically.

Focusing the Power of Early Educators

Control verses No Control

WHAT WE CAN / SHOULD CONTROL	WHAT WE HAVE NO CONTROL OR LIMITED CONTROL OF
★ How we deal with conflict (address the problem, actively work to find solutions)	★ Some degree of conflict with coworkers, parents, children
★ Our reactions to our feelings (our behavior); responding to feelings, not reacting to behavior; our curriculum & instruction	★ Children's behavior
★ Our classroom lighting, noise level, room arrangement	★ Physiological/neurological or sensory status of a child
★ Understanding and responding to individual temperaments through our tone of voice, proximity, curriculum	★ Children's temperament
★ Developing trusting relationships with parents	★ Skill level of parents
★ Choosing toys that offer variety, are developmentally appropriate, require children to use critical thinking skills and creativity	★ Availability of toys that promote violence, stereotypes, etc.
★ Eliminating TV and video viewing from your child care program ★ Working with families to promote responsible media viewing ★ Contacting TV networks and government agencies to voice your opinion about their programming.	★ Increased media violence
★	★
★	★
★	★

Strategies to Help Infants, Toddlers, and Preschoolers Learn Interpersonal Skills

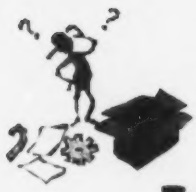
Conflict resolution and problem solving within the classroom setting should ideally take place on a foundation of warm, trusting relationships. It is important then, for the peaceful classroom to be a place where children have learned to enjoy and appreciate each other and their teachers. Following are a few activities, which can be used while providing routine care to infants and toddlers or with preschoolers during circle time or during transitions:

- ★ Very young infants are "sensory sensitive." To help them feel safe and connected in early care settings, educators can assign a primary caregiver, create many opportunities for close contact, provide attractive and age appropriate toys to interest them, and be available when they need responsive care (Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development, 1995).
- ★ Infants and toddlers get "hooked" on human faces. When changing diapers or feeding infants and toddlers, early educators can model different facial expressions to help young children begin to learn what expressions mean and later the words that express these feelings.

Preschoolers begin to connect more with their peers. Below are some ideas described by Prutzman (1994) that early educators can use to help this age group:

- ★ Two children face each other while mimicking each other's motions. Once they are used to projecting a mirror image, then they can try more complex flowing movements.
- ★ On a large carpeted area, have children one by one, lie flat on the floor with their legs and arms in any position, so that each child fills a space. This will form a "human jigsaw puzzle." Take an instant picture of your results.

- ★ Give each child a sheet of paper formed in the shape of a balloon and ask them to illustrate something they like to do. Have children tape balloons to wall and share with group (at a later time if appropriate) their illustration.
- ★ Have children work in pairs. One of the children says to the other "Do You Love Me Honey?" in any way that he or she can make that child laugh. The other child responds by saying: "I Love Ya Honey, but I just can't smile, without laughing." This is sure to get *everyone* laughing.
- ★ Small group one-word story telling can be fun and help children learn to listen to one another. The teacher can start a story by saying one word (or the first phrase) which the story should be based on. Each child then gets to add one word at a time to the development of a progressive story. The teacher can write the story on a large piece of chart paper as the children add to the story and illustrate it afterwards. Example: Teacher begins by saying: Once upon a time there lived a...(and adds prompts as needed.)



Strategies for Embedding Conflict Resolution and Problem Solving Into The Regular Routine and Curriculum

Oftentimes, teachers feel like they waste a lot of time dealing with children's arguments and fights. But is it really a waste of time? It is if the adult tries to "bury" the conflict rather than using it as a "learning laboratory" for problem solving skills. Because one of the goals for children is that they grow up to be creative problem solvers (Maine's *Learning Results*, 1997), why not use children's conflict to generate interest in resolving some real life problems? Hodges (1995) and the others listed below provided some of the preschool ideas that follow.

Conflicts provide opportunities to:

- ★ Talk about loaded words, i.e., words that are intended to inflict emotional harm or may cause defensive reactions. Talk with children about how these words make them feel….how the other person reacts to those words…alternative ways that children can express feelings and have everyone still feel safe.
- ★ Build trust and understanding through sharing circles. Children can be asked *(optionally)* to complete a sentence like "A time I was happy (sad, frightened) was…" or "When I'm angry I….."
- ★ Identify, label and discuss feelings and emotions. The following examples can assist children in this area:
  1. Use music to create emotional moods and allow children to dance to the feelings they discern in the music.
  2. Provide props to illustrate emotions. Make pictures or photo cards of faces that display emotions like happiness, sadness, surprise, anger and fear (have older preschoolers help construct them). Use these cards to get children to tell you and others how they feel or when discussing emotions and feelings at group time. Construct puppets that portray different expressions and use them to act out feelings.

3. Create an emotion collage with pictures cut out of magazines or from photos of class members.
4. Another feeling activity is to ask children to use *their bodies* to say "I'm happy." "I'm sad." I'm mad." (No words.) Then talk about the body language that they used to express their emotions and feelings.

★ Demonstrate the importance of respecting individuals differences.

★ Select books that accurately represent people from a variety of cultures and races as well as, people with disabilities.

★ Display "culture rich" materials, pictures, photos and have available multicultural toys, clothing, cooking utensils, tools and games.

★ Address children's questions about skin color, language, and adaptive equipment honestly and use these opportunities to incorporate diversity and respect in the curriculum (McCracken, 1993).

★ Teach about the importance of sharing, turn-taking and rules.

★ Engage children in establishing group rules that *make sense to them.*

★ Use circle time to develop cooperative rules or "I care rules" (Teaching Tolerance Project, 1997).

★ Model appropriate conflict resolution skills and teach skills for creative problem solving.

★ Teach children to use a simple problem solving format such as the one described by Carlsson-Paige and Levin (1992):

1. Acknowledge children's feelings and help them express what they feel.
2. Help children define the problem.
3. Assist children to discuss possible solutions.
4. Help children choose solutions.
5. Provide time and opportunities for children to evaluate how the solution is working.

★ See The Peace Table Strategy for additional ideas.

Another Strategy to Assist Children with Problem Solving: Puppet Play

Concrete images and opportunities for children to practice ideas and solutions helps preschoolers develop the skills to use appropriate problem solving strategies when the need arises. As described by Diane Levin during the May 7, 1999 Early Childhood Seminar, safety is the organizer for a peaceful classroom. As children begin to experience what safety means early educators can use this as the beginning step for helping children think about and solve problems. When disagreements arise, teachers can begin by asking children 2 questions: *"Do you feel safe?" And, if not, "how can you solve this problem and feel safe here?"*

Using strategies like problem puppets help children work through a range of conflict resolution skills. Here's how it works:

- Make simple sock puppets (preschoolers can assist).
- During circle time, use the puppets to role-play an argument or problem that is similar to one that happened in the classroom.
- Ask children to discuss the problem and the feelings associated with it.
- Ask children to offer possible solutions to solve the problem
- Provide children with expanded ideas on resolving the situation.
- As a group, have the children select a solution.
- Role play the solution for the children using the puppets.
- Discuss with the children what happened and how well the idea worked.
- Try other solutions and discuss.
- Provide time for children to use the puppets to role play.
- Include the problem puppets in a learning center to provide children with additional time to experiment with them.

The Peace Table
A Strategy
for Teaching Children
Conflict Resolution Skills

Problem solving is a learning process (Britz & Richard, 1992). Infants have an inborn desire to explore their environment. Just watch the process a determined 2 year old trying to climb into a rocking chair is going through. As we observe how he is planning, building on what he has just learned, selecting new solutions, and trying out new ideas, we recognize the seeds of his evolving problem solving process. Educators in peaceful classrooms can use this natural motivation to extend children's learning and build their repertoire of skills for finding creative solutions.

Conflict is inevitable and unavoidable. Recognizing that it also offers rich opportunities for learning and growth should motivate the early care educator to *plan* for those experiences in meaningful ways. The purpose of the Peace Table is to provide young children with a structure for resolving their problems. The importance of thoughtfully preparing the children for using the peace table cannot be understated.

The following suggestions are offered for preparing children for successful use of the Peace Table:

- ★ Talk to the children about what the word "peace" means. Have the children give their own thoughts about peace. What does it look like? Feel like? Record their thoughts about peace and post on the classroom wall.
- ★ Place the Peace Table itself in a quiet corner of the room.
- ★ Explain to the children that the Peace Table is somewhere you feel comfortable, where you can talk to your friends if they do something that makes you sad or mad.
- ★ Involve children in decorating walls near the Peace Table so that it says "This is a friendly place."

To help children learn how to use the Peace Table, early care educators can:

- ★ Invent role plays using hand puppets first and then let children act out those roles.

★ Post near the Peace Table the rules for fighting fair. Discuss with the children what these rules mean, giving concrete examples. Until the children become very familiar with the process, the teacher will want to facilitate the peace process by focusing on the rules for fair fighting, as follows:

1. Identify the problem. (ex., Teacher can ask "What's the problem?" Repeat the children's responses in order to clarify for both children the nature of the problem. Melissa has Jodi's toy. Jodi wants it back.)
2. Focus on the problem. (ex., "Two children want the same toy.")
3. Attack the problem, not the person. (ex., The teacher can ask children for possible solutions. "What do you think you could do to be happy?" Could you both play with the toy? Share? Take turns? The teacher can repeat the child's response and check for agreement.)
4. Listen with an open mind. (ex., Remind children that they are there to listen, not interrupt or blame. This is a place for friends to solve problems and since they both have the problem, they will need to come up with a solution that works for both of them.)
5. Treat a person's feelings with respect. (ex., The teacher can help with this, by identifying and labeling feelings for children or soliciting their feelings.)
6. Take responsibility for your actions. (Once children understand that the Peace Table is not a place where blame is assessed, they are free to look for solutions, be accountable and look for ways to make it "right" with their friend.)

Until the children are familiar with the Peace Table, they may not recognize when and how to use it, so the teacher will need to remind them by asking "Would it help if you went to the Peace Table?" Going to the Peace Table should always be voluntary. It is the teacher's role to make it an inviting place where children feel safe and respected.

As the children become more familiar with the process, they will take the initiative to go to the Peace Table on their own. The teacher should let the children know however that it is *always* allright to ask for help if they are having trouble resolving an issue.

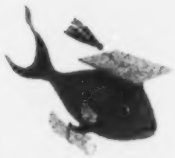
- With concern running so high in the wake of nationwide school violence, early care programs may want to hold a parent night and explain what they are doing to promote tolerance and peace in their classrooms. This can be an opportunity to demonstrate what staff is doing with the Peace Table and enlist parent's support in re-enforcing its use in other settings.

Adapted with permission from Starting Small: Teaching Tolerance in Preschool and the Early Grades. (1997). Teaching Tolerance Project. Montgomery, Alabama: Southern Poverty Law Center. Pp 154-155.

Strategies for Using Children's Books to Deal with Conflict Resolution and Prosocial Behavior

Using concrete materials and activities helps children learn how to resolve conflicts and play with others. Children's books are wonderful tools to help preschoolers hear, see, think about and express their opinions. Early educators can guide the learning process by reading books aloud, having a structure problem solving discussion, and providing follow-up activities such as drawing, book making and dramatizations to help children integrate their learning and try out ideas. The following is a selection of books that deal with conflict resolution and prosocial behavior.

- *Ten, Nine, Eight* by Molly Bang (ages 2-4 years)
- *Mr. Grumpy's Motor Car* by John Burningham (ages 2-4 years)
- *Let's Be Enemies* by Janice May Udry (ages 3-4 years)
- *The Grouchy Ladybug* by Eric Carl (ages 3-5 years)
- *Swimmy by Leo Lionni* (ages 3-5 years)
- *The Knight and the Dragon* by Tomie dePaula (ages 3-6 years)
- *No Fighting No Biting* by Else Holmelund Minarik (ages 4-5 years)
- *Best Day of the Week* by Nancy Carlsson-Paige (ages 4-6 years)
- *Yo! Yes?* by Chris Raschka (ages 4-6 years)
- *The Hating Book* by Charlotte Zolotow (ages 4-6 years)
- *Two Giants* by Michael Foreman (ages 4-6 years)
- *Where the Wild Things Are* by Maurice Sendak (ages 4-6 years)
- *Alexander and The Terrible, Horrible, No Good Very Bad Day* by Judith Viorst (ages 4-7 years)
- *The Temper Tantrum Book* by Edna Preston Mitchell (ages 4-7 years)
- *Feelings* by Aliki (ages 4-7 years)
- *The Quarreling Book* by Charlotte Zolotow (ages 5-6 years)
- *Bang Bang You're Dead* by Louise Fitzhugh & Sandra Scoppettone (ages 5-7 years)



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Articles

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Jones, E. & Nimmo, J. (1999). Collaboration, conflict, and change: Thoughts on education as provocation. Young Children, 54 (1), 5-10.

Levin, D. (1996). Working it out together in circle time. Child Care Information Exchange, 51-54.

Videotape

Teaching Tolerance Project (Producer) McGovern, M. (Director. (1997). Starting small: Teaching children tolerance. [Film]. Montgomery, AL: Teaching Tolerance Project.

Web Sites to Check Out

- ★ Southern Poverty Law Center: Teaching Tolerance National Education Project: http://www.splcenter.org/
- ★ Educators for Social Responsibility: http://www.esr.national.org
- ★ Peace Education Foundation: http://www.peace-ed.org

Chapter Four

Pulling It All Together with Positive Supports

"It has been a terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day. My mom says some days are like that."

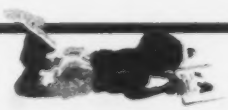
Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day by Judith Viorst

Chapter Four
Pulling It All Together with Positive Supports

In the first chapter of this publication, we discussed the basic human need of belonging and how this affects children's growth and development. In chapters two and three (friendship, building peaceful classrooms) we focused on skill-building strategies for helping children meet their belonging and social-emotional needs. Here, in chapter four, we will be exploring how the information provided in the first three chapters can inform our practice in working with all children, including those with challenging behavior.

The authors call this multidimensional approach to creating inclusive early care communities "positive supports." This should be distinguished from positive behavioral supports involving the use of reinforcement, which involves the use of rewards to shape or manipulate children's behavior. Positive supports are, in contrast, actions and beliefs that reflect respectful interpersonal relationships, choice, communication, inclusive communities, and collaboration to assist a child in becoming a valued member of the early care setting. They are based on warm, genuine relationships between adults and children and include a wide variety of strategies that are given unconditionally to both the child with challenging behavior and the adults who care for him or her (Kurtz, Kendrick & Son, 1998).

There are many things that contribute to challenging behavior. According to Pitonyak (1996) challenging behavior often results from unmet needs. Unmet needs may be displayed through challenging behaviors because of underlying problems with a child's sensory reactivity and processing, communication, and motor planning (Greenspan & Wieder, 1997). Being able to communicate is a fundamental and critical skill for young children. Donnellan, Mirenda, Mesaros, and Fassbender (1984) have found that there is a strong correlation between problem behavior and the lack of functional communication skills.



Given this awareness, specific strategies for positive supports naturally develop out of an understanding of who the child is and what needs are currently unmet. They are as individual and multi-faceted as the child. It may be as basic as a kind word during a time of discouragement or as complex as assistive technology for the improvement of a communication problem. For example, suppose a child tantrums every day at 11:15 am. What might the early educator do? Positive supports for this child will vary depending upon his or her *reason/s* for this behavior. If the reason the child is tantrumming at 11:15 is because of a transition from an unfinished, favored activity, the positive support would be different than if the reason were fatigue or hunger or her medication had "kicked in or out." This example demonstrates the essential "detective role" the early educator plays in trying to figure out the meaning of a particular behavior. It also illustrates why it is vitally important for the early care professional to develop meaningful relationships with the children in their care as well as the parents of these children.

In order to develop meaningful supports, an educator must not only know the individual intimately, through continuous observation, but also partner effectively with the child's parents. Mothers and fathers should be considered the experts on their own children. They have a unique perspective acquired within the context of an ongoing, long-term committed relationship. Genuine collaboration with families, therefore, has the potential for making the work of the educator more effective as well as less overwhelming, realizing that "we're all in this together."

Knowledge of the child and family, utilization of developmentally appropriate practices, and support and training in a variety of interventions in a climate characterized by open communication constitutes positive supports. These components provide the team with the ingredients necessary to creatively share, problem solve, and try out new approaches together. Support is provided to all parties as these strategies are built on the development of respectful relationships.

All individuals need positive supports throughout their lives. Positive supports are about giving *the gift of quality of life* to all infants, toddlers and young children through the establishment of consistent, respectful, responsive, caring relationships and *restoring quality of life* to those who

continue to have these unmet human needs. For a more in depth look at positive supports, consider the following information.

At what age does the need for positive supports become important for children?

Positive supports are required for healthy growth and development throughout the life span. Of course, the types of supports will change as an individual grows from infancy to childhood, into adolescence, adulthood and old age. Positive supports can take many forms and may change at different points in the life cycle. Examples may include:

- *In infancy:* having an adult who understands and responds in a nurturing fashion to the baby's cues.
- *In early childhood:* teaching a three-year-old communication skills (for example replacing a less effective means of communicating (hitting or grabbing) with a more effective means of communicating (signing "stop" or saying the word).
- *In middle childhood:* providing opportunities to showcase a teen's special talents or receive help with organizational skills.
- *In adolescence:* being alert as the child grows in independence to allow meaningful choices and appropriate guidelines.
- *In adulthood:* offering to watch a friend's children so mom and dad can have a night out.
- *In old age:* checking in regularly with an elder neighbor or relative; offering to run errands or take the person to a doctor's appointment.

Offering respectful positive supports, then, means having a deep understanding of who the individual is and what unmet needs are impacting that person's quality of life (Lovett, 1996; Pitonyak, 1996).

The keen observer is likely to see "behaviors" emerging at any time of life if the individual's needs are not being met. Consider how a teenager with few choices and inappropriate guidelines might react...or a senior citizen who, having lost his/her driver's

license (i.e., independence and mobility) because of vision problems, might "behave" after weeks of sitting alone at home.

Positive supports are *not* techniques or strategies used to alter or eliminate children's overt behaviors (Greenspan & Weider, 1997). Instead, the focus is on looking at the underlying processing, communication, relationship, or developmental issues and working to address these (Greenspan & Weider, 1997). They encompasses a respectful way of responding to other people, children *or* adults, whose quality of life is often tenuous. From infancy onward, positive supports provide the context for relationship development and set the stage for building a foundation for cooperative behavior.

What results when a child's basic human needs are not met?

Maslow's hierarchy of human needs typifies how individuals move through a progression of basic needs from physiological, to safety to belonging to mastery and finally self-actualization (Maslow, 1970). Children move from one level to another *only* when the needs of the preceding level are addressed. If needs are blocked at one level, therefore, forward progression will be halted and the individual may react to the frustration by "misbehaving." The misbehavior in turn is often perceived as a negative characteristic by other children and adults and may result in fewer supportive relationships, almost ensuring that the child will stay stuck in a maladaptive mode. *This is why we maintain that behavior results from unmet needs* (Pitonyak, 1996).

As discussed earlier, behavior is a form of communication. Behavior communicates a child's happiness as well as his/her distress. It is important for early educators to remember that behavior is typically a child's best attempts to get his or her needs met. Therefore, when a teacher sees a child misbehaving, the first thing he/she might want to consider (safety issues having been addressed) is "What need is this child trying to meet by using this behavior?" or "If this child were speaking instead of behaving, what would she/he be saying?" Often the answers to these

questions can be fairly simple, and if the adult responds to those messages in the child's behavior, (rather than reacting to the behavior itself) he or she will likely "be on the right track." For example, a two-year-old is tugging at a staff person's clothing and whining. If the toddler were talking he/she might be saying, *"Pay attention to me!" (or "I miss my mommy." or "I'm tired.").*

Understanding the child's behavioral message will help the adult respond in a respectful way. Adults send messages through their behavior, too. Sometimes, unknowingly, adult behavior tells a child the opposite of what is intended. For example, a response might say to a child: *"Your feelings are unacceptable or unimportant to me!"* Unfortunately these unintended messages can become part of our curriculum and set the stage for "accidental" or future learning. In the above example, that child is learning that he/she cannot count on an adult when he/she needs him or her, that he/she must fend for herself, and that no one cares about his or her feelings (Pawl & St. John, 1998).

If messages like these are given and a child's basic human needs are not met, then a child may learn to be wary of relationships, and may internalize their feelings of insecurity. We then see children who do not feel safe, secure, or respected. They show us this based on their individual temperament and make-up, by being either passive, unresponsive, and reluctant to try new things or aggressive, destructive, and oppositional.

How does early brain research help us to understand behavior in young children?

Early brain research has confirmed what early educators have long believed, that "Good beginnings never end." Healthy experiences in infancy and early childhood, such as warm responsive care and positive attachment, serve a protective function, "immunizing" an infant to some extent against the effects of later stress (Wolfe & Brandt, 1998). We learn from this research that early neurological development is shaped not only by physical conditions but also by a child's social environment (Families and Work Institute, 1998).

Sensitive care and responsive adults provide children with the positive experiences they need to develop a strong self-concept and emotional competence (Hawley, 1998). Just as there are children who are stabilized by these high quality experiences, there are also children who tend to learn negative behaviors through inconsistent, stressful, or poor quality care. A child's experience of trauma, abuse, neglect, maternal depression, substance abuse, and poverty among other risk factors can also compromise his or her early experiences impacting behavior as well as quality of life. {A cautionary note: Not all children who exhibit challenging behavior have experienced the risk factors stated above. Some are born with neurologically sensitive systems that may "interpret" normal experiences as traumatic or threatening, such as children with autism or ADHD (central processing disorders). It is wise therefore, not to make assumptions about the quality of a child's care, based on behavioral observations alone.}

What early childhood models best demonstrate the use of positive supports in early care settings?

We believe early childhood models that best exemplify the use of positive supports are those whose foundation is developmentally appropriate practice. Developmentally appropriate practices (DAP) are based on:

- What is known about how children develop and learn at different ages.
- What is known about the strengths, interests, abilities, learning styles and needs of individuals in the group.
- What is known about the social and cultural background and experiences of individuals in the group (Bredēkamp and Copple, 1997).

Developmentally appropriate practice then is not a curriculum, a form of instruction, or a strategy. DAP is a best practice model. This model is based on constructivist and developmental learning

theories. Well known theorist Jean Piaget provides much of the learning principles for DAP. The basis of DAP is that children's early learning and developmental growth are the result of quality early experiences, as well as quality and frequent interactions. It tells us that children "construct" developmental and pre-academic knowledge and skills. They do this through active engagement in play and in environments that are highly responsive, respectful, and supportive of child-directed activities and teacher facilitated experiences (Mahoney, Wheeden & Janas, 1997).

Some of the key features that we associate with programs that are developmentally appropriate are:

- **Child-centered**—learning activities are initiated by the child, supported and facilitated by the caregiver/teacher.
- **Play-based**—the child is involved in active exploration and social activity within an interactive environment.
- **"Whole-child"**—all areas of development are reflected in an integrated approach.
- **Process oriented**—rather than product oriented; creative; it's the act of doing!
- **Anti-bias**—multicultural and nonsexist experiences, materials and equipment.
- **Functional and relevant** to the lives of young children.
- **Linked to assessment through observation and recordings** (Bredekamp, et al. 1997).

Programs grounded in DAP are philosophically consistent with the concept of positive supports. They honor the individuality of each child and demonstrate a commitment to each one's optimum growth and development.

There are a variety of program models that employ different curricula and which utilize various teaching methods that are based on developmentally appropriate practices. All share the basic tenets of DAP and incorporate other theories and principles of learning that support high quality early childhood programs. Some of the examples we've listed are those mentioned in previous chapters but warrant consideration here, since they also

illustrate the tenets of positive supports. We have selected three models to share as examples.

- **A high quality Montessori program** has many features that are both developmentally appropriate and are characteristic of positive support. The Montessori model is based on a profound respect for the child. In a Montessori school a child is offered frequent opportunities for free choice, which contributes to the goal of self-discipline. In addition, the Montessori environment, beyond being safe and physically healthy, is structured to support choice making and stimulates and provides for cognitive, emotional, physical, and social development. Adults in these settings foster a sense of individuality as well as a sense of community. Rules are simple and easily understood: respect for self, others and the environment. Mixed age groupings in the classroom support social responsibility and interdependence in children as well as provide constant opportunities for communication and cooperation. All of these structures and practices contribute to meeting the basic needs of young children to be safe, to belong, to achieve. (Humphryes, 1998).
- **The Reggio Emilia model** focuses in large part on the building of warm and collaborative relationships between children, caregivers and parents. The physical environment of a Reggio based school is arranged to encourage children to make choices, solve problems, or make discoveries while learning. In this type of program, the child is perceived as a communicator and caring adults spend large amounts of time observing and responding to the many ways that children communicate through words, movement, drawing, painting, building, sculpture, shadow play, collage, dramatic play, and music. This encourages intimate connections between children, peers, and adults and contributes to an environment (considered the third teacher in a Reggio program) where children's needs for safety, belonging, and self-esteem are met (Cadwell-Boyd, 1997).
- **The High/Scope preschool model** is based on Piaget's theories. It stresses the shared learning between adults and

children as well as, the collaborative aspects of learning, discovery, support and control. Activities are open-ended and emphasize child-initiated play. Team teaching is promoted and families are seen as an integral part of the program. Children work with other children and adults in group planning and cooperative efforts. In the High/Scope preschool, the adult purposefully orders the environment through structure, physical layout, and the organization of activities and materials. This allows the child to be actively involved, make decisions, and solve problems with guidance and support from teachers. Children work with other children and adults in group planning and cooperative efforts. One component of the High/Scope daily routine is the use of the plan-do-review process. Utilizing this format, children plan their work, engage in the work, and then review or reflect about how they accomplished their work. Respect and relationship building, as well as a focus on self-chosen tasks and practice in identifying personal goals and using problem solving skills provide the underpinnings of a High/Scope preschool. (Hohmann & Weikart, 1995).

These program examples illustrate the application of DAP and explain how they are designed to meet the basic human needs of young children as well as provide the foundation for how we want children to be. Developmentally appropriate, high quality, early care can be provided in any setting. It is not necessary for family child care providers and other educators to adopt or fit into one of the models described. Instead, considerations of the quality components of one or more models to determine what components they can use and/or adapt to incorporate the principles of developmentally appropriate practices within their own setting can be undertaken.

High quality early childhood programs are designed to meet the immediate needs of individual children as well as establish a foundation for addressing our long-term goals for children. *Everything an early educator does today can contribute to or detract from the child's ability to reach those desired outcomes.* It is therefore essential that early care educators' design their programs based on

DAP with thoughtful structure and evaluation of their goals for children in mind. If, for example, a long-term goal for children is that they become "active problem solvers," the educator may want to evaluate his/her program by considering how well this skill is being taught by the present curriculum. For example, the educator may want to ask: What he or she is doing that contributes to this goal? And what instructional practices might be impeding the goal?

Evaluating and reflecting on an on-going basis what we *really* are teaching children in our early care settings is a critical part of maintaining our direction toward these long-term goals. Exemplary early care programs prepare children for moving into the world and provide positive supports as a matter of practice. They address children's physical, cognitive, and emotional needs which in turn promotes resiliency, adaptive behavior, and the ability to sustain warm, reciprocal relationships.

What is the connection between the use of positive supports and inclusive early care and education?

Inclusion is a word that has come to mean many things to different people. In fact, society's understanding of what it means to offer diverse populations a place within typical settings has evolved dramatically over during the last twenty years, as exemplified by the changing language used to describe the process: from mainstreaming to integration to inclusion which discusses all kids. Inclusive early care settings:

- Offer unconditional membership and belonging to all children and adults, including those with disabilities.
- Create and maintain warm, accepting environments that honor individual differences.
- Are flexible, process-oriented, goal-directed, and outcome-based.
- Are rooted in developmentally appropriate practice.
- Focus on each child's skills, talents, gifts, and abilities.

- Rely on collaboration and long term commitment, working together in partnership with caregivers and families.
- Are relationship-based and assume mutual respect and cooperation.
- Are authorized by the Americans with Disabilities Act, which assures that children with disabilities will not be discriminated against in public accommodations, including all child care operations (Child Care Law Center, 1994).

Inclusive early care settings are places where all children are welcome (Council for Exceptional Children, 1994). If a program consistently implements developmentally appropriate practices, it will likely meet the social, emotional, and cognitive needs of the vast majority of children who attend (Miller, 1996). There may be however, a number of children for whom the typical supports provided in such a program are not sufficient to address their complex needs. When this situation occurs the early childhood team may want to consider additional supports to assist the child in the typical setting.

The type, intensity, and structure of supports and interventions will vary depending upon the individual child. Suppose a toddler were to cry hysterically *every day* throughout naptime in the infant-toddler room, disturbing the other children and worrying the staff. The educators try everything they can think of to calm the child, but nothing works. What should they do? As it turned out (this is a true story), the child was scheduled to receive medication for asthma prior to naptime. The medication caused anxiety and hyperactivity, thus preventing the toddler from sleeping.

Once the staff understood the reason for the child's crying, they were able to develop appropriate supports. In some cases, the medication schedule might be adapted, however, in this instance, the staff identified an additional support person to come into the program during naptime. This allowed the child to spend time engaged in active play (sometimes outside, sometimes in an adjacent room) for a period of time while the effects of the medication were diminishing. Later, when her body could relax, she was put down for a nap. This alternative arrangement

provided an individually responsive "positive support" that addressed the needs of the toddler, the staff, the family, and the other children in the setting.

Additional examples of positive supports implemented for young children with disabilities include:

- A teacher who uses circle time to teach the other children in the class to communicate with a young child who is hard of hearing as well as to reinforce his/her use of sign language within the preschool setting;
- Environmental adaptations used to make the classroom a "friendlier" place for a child with sensory issues (lower lights; quiet space where he/she can calm himself; hammock swing hung from ceiling to provide sensory integration; bean bag chair to be used during circle time);
- An early care educator who facilitates and cues a child whose social skills are impacting her friendships;
- A teacher is allowed time out of the classroom to plan with the early childhood team and/or attend training related to a specific disability, such as autism, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), or cerebral palsy.

Positive supports are useful in *any* setting but are critically important in inclusive settings where some children (and educators) may need more intensive assistance.

How does knowing about positive supports help us work more effectively with a child with challenging behavior?

- *Positive supports require the educator to have a deep understanding of behavior. Behavior is a child's way of communicating unmet need. Learning how to "translate" the hidden messages of behavior will help the educator respond effectively to the individual needs of children with challenging behavior (Pitonyak, 1996).*

Positive supports provide a framework to guide respectful actions between children and adults. The are not quick-fix solutions to complex problems nor do they focus only on eliminating behaviors that may confound adults. Focusing solely on the

elimination of negative behaviors can often be the worst thing to do. To attempt to eliminate the behavior without addressing the need that the child is trying to communicate may cause the adult to miss the intent. A positive supports approach focuses instead on the message that the child is communicating through his or her behavior and seeks to address the need implied therein. When the need is addressed and the message (behavior) heard it is likely the behavior will naturally diminish.

- *Positive supports challenge us all to utilize all available information about the individual child and family; as well as information about the early care and education program itself, including classroom environment, curriculum, instruction, and assessment. This information, in addition to knowledge of child development and best practices in the field, provides the basis for a functional assessment which can guide educators as they develop appropriate support systems for children, including those with challenging behaviors.*

The assessment phase is a critical component of positive supports. It solicits and honors the contributions of all participants in the process: child, parents, early educators, extended family, and community (Turnbull, Turnbull & Blue-Banning, 1994). As the team of concerned educators and parents gather, discuss, and reflect on the information each brings to the table, a clearer, more diverse picture of the child begins to emerge as well as a deeper understanding of his/her behavior. This multi-faceted understanding guides the team as it designs appropriate and meaningful supports.

Positive supports *is not* about having all the answers. It *is* about knowing the right questions to ask... and having the insight, courage, and strength to respond in nurturing ways. For example, an educator might ask: "What is this child's learning style (or temperament)?" "Given this learning style, are there opportunities in my classroom for this child to express himself or herself and succeed?" "How does my own learning style as a teacher mesh with that of the child?" and, finally, "What are the implications for my classroom practice, given the answers to the previous questions?"

A brief brainstorming session addressing two questions: "What *works* for this child, to increase motivation and enthusiasm?" and "What *does not* work, or causes boredom or frustration?" can often help educators suggest possible ways to make the classroom a more inviting place for a child who is having difficulties. Asking perceptive questions affords the team a deeper understanding of the child which can inform the professional's practice. Ultimately, success in individualizing the curriculum, instruction, and assessment processes will depend largely on the educator's grasp of the "whole child."

- *Knowing about positive supports helps educators understand and come to value the importance of collaboration, or working in partnership with families and others, to develop meaningful programs and supports.*

Because there are no easy answers, early educators who employ positive supports work with a team of committed persons (first and foremost among them the child's family) who know and care about the individual (Turnbull, Turbiville, Schaffer & Schaffer, 1996). For some, the team may only be the educator and the family, while for others it may be a group of many more, including family, community, and professional partners.

While the size of the group is not important, the commitment and willingness of adults to work together (especially when the going gets tough or the answers seem elusive) to support and meaningfully engage with the child and family is essential. Each person on the team is seen as both an important source of information, i.e., a potential resource, and as "a player" in the child's and family system. This means that the needs of one individual, although very important, do not take precedence over the needs of the others in the system/team or family.

In developing supports for an individual child in a classroom therefore, special attention should also be given to the types of support the staff might need in order to care for the needs of the child. (i.e., specific training or special education consultation; additional assistance during transition times). The family's goals, concerns, and individual needs are also an essential consideration.

- *Employing positive supports provides early educators a lens through which to determine the things they can control and impact.*

Educators often get frustrated dealing with behaviors that may not be within a child's control. For example, suppose the educator has a child with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) in his/her classroom. What often happens for these children is that their behaviors come to frustrate and irritate both children and adults, impacting relationships and burdening the child with a reputation that precedes him or her.

Often adults react to the behaviors and the child is "punished" for behaviors over which he/she may have no control. Attempting to change a child's behavior without addressing the underlying issues or conditions is futile. To assume that a child has control over neurologically driven behaviors is unfair. While medication can sometimes assist a child to resume impulse control and stay on task, it is not always effective and/or the parents may have concerns about side effects and refuse treatment.

Educators often get "stuck" (kids are not the only ones who "get stuck") at this point. Unfortunately, the focus turns to the child's behavior or parental action, two matters over which they may have no control. At this point, it is critical to revisit the many factors over which they do have control: classroom environment; curriculum; instruction; assessment and access to other professional support and advice. Understanding a child's behavior, though difficult at times to figure out, can often assist educators toward more creative and empathic ways of relating to a child (Greenspan & Weider, 1997).

A sampling of positive supports that might be considered for a child with neurological impairments such as autism or ADHD are:

- turning down the lights;
- giving a five minute warning before transitions;
- recognizing when tough times occur and providing additional support at these times;
- speaking more slowly, softly, and at the child's eye level;

- facilitating or cueing prior to a child reaching his/her frustration level;
- teaching the child relaxation techniques;
- teaching and modeling social and play skills such as how to greet another playmate, how to join a small group of children playing with blocks, how to share a toy;
- arranging for the child to play with another child (taking care to select a playmate) in an activity where he will be successful;
- considering how routines and schedules work to either lend needed consistency to the child's day or "set him up" (for example by insisting he be quiet and sleep when he is not tired or forcing him to transition during a favorite activity).

Because children are all different, ever-changing, and impossible to typify, there is no one preferred way to work with every child. In fact, as many parents learn in raising their children, "Just when you think you know what you're doing, everything falls apart." Positive supports, therefore, provide a framework for on-going observation, adaptation, reflection, and refinement as a meaningful way of thinking about children with challenging behavior. It is important to remember that while a team may devise a support that works well for several months and then the situation may break down again. This does not necessarily indicate that the team made a mistake. It may simply mean that due to the child's growth and development, the types of support may need to be adapted to fit his/her present circumstances.

Human behavior is affected by so many variables that, despite competent and caring staff, there will always be surprises. Early educators must remember this on difficult days in the classroom. Blaming themselves (educators can be awfully hard on themselves), the child or the family is usually unproductive and may actually hinder individuals or teams from moving forward. To support children, especially children with challenging behaviors, is difficult work. It requires lots of time, consistency, caring, and the support to do the work.

In summary, learning about positive supports provides early educators with the tools necessary to help children develop healthy, secure, respectful relationships and cooperative behavior. Programs designed to help children meet long-term goals truly enable children to enter school "ready to learn" and available to participate and contribute. Because almost all learning occurs in relationships working with young children to help them learn to relate to others and develop healthy coping strategies is essential (Greenspan & Weider, 1997).

For this reason, every chapter in this book has addressed the need to focus on emotional competence (Hawley, 1998).

Getting to know the child in a deep and personal way is the behavioral equivalent of "cracking the genetic code." It allows the early educator to look at aspects of the individual and his/her environment that *really* matter (quality of life, dreams, strengths, skills, health, temperament, and learning style, etc.) It calls upon the educator to summon the strength and courage to examine his/her own "behavior" within the context of the relationship with the child and reflect on the interplay of critical personal and environmental factors.

Positive supports are all about an educator's commitment to do "whatever it takes" to reach the young children in their lives.

PRACTICAL STRATEGIES FOR POSITIVE SUPPORTS

As we described throughout this book, creating inclusive early care communities is a process. Likewise, building cooperative behavior happens in settings that support all children. Employing positive supports is also a process. Designing environments and concentrating on building relationships and interactions that tell children they are safe and they belong builds cooperative behavior. Early educators can begin practicing positive supports by reviewing and applying the strategies from Chapters 1, 2, and 3.

In addition, we have included some specific positive supports strategies on the following pages.

A Program Planning Exercise: Creating Inclusive Early Care Communities: "Our Goals for Kids"

High quality early childhood programs provide the foundation for meeting the individual needs of young children. The early educator can build on this foundation by identifying and working to address the skills needed to reach the goals (or outcomes) they have for young children. It can be thought of as a "backward planning strategy" beginning with the questions, "How do we want children to be?" or "What are our long-term goals for children?" If the long-term goals for children are to grow up to be responsible, respectful, caring, creative problem solvers, able communicators, and effective collaborators, then, the next logical question is "What must early educators *do* to create the physical environment, curriculum, instruction, and assessment that contributes to, supports, and teaches children to be responsive, respectful, competent people? Evaluating on an on-going basis what we really are teaching children in our early care settings is a critical part of maintaining our direction toward these long-term goals (Kohn, 1996).

This exercise provides early educators with a planning and evaluation strategy for identifying program goals and philosophy and examining these in light of everyday practice (what educators do in their programs). It is designed as a 2 part process.

Purpose Part I:

- ★ To provide staff with an opportunity to think about long term goals for children.
- ★ To work collaboratively to develop a set of shared goals and values.
- ★ To allow staff time to review the information, think about and discuss the following:
  1. How do the goals we set for children reflect our values and beliefs?
  2. Are our programs and classrooms places that promote these qualities?

3. Are these values, beliefs and goals similar to the other educators and parents in our programs?

Materials Needed:

- chart paper
- tape
- markers
- Examples of other goals (Maine's Learning Results: The Guiding Principles, others)

Directions:

1. To begin the exercise, staff should think about and discuss the following:
   - What are the long term goals we have for children?
   - How do we want kids to be? (It is helpful to use the rules for brainstorming and select a recorder to create a list of goals.)
2. Following the brainstorming, staff might look at the list generated and think about: What themes emerge ? What generalizations can be made about the ideas listed? What generalizations can be made about the ideas absent?
3. Providing additional examples of goals and guiding principles, can help the staff review how the ones they came up with compare to others.

Part II

Given these desired goals, educators need to realize that everything they do either contributes to these outcomes, detracts, or has no effect at all. For example, how educators communicate, set-up environments, select toys and materials, teach, facilitate, and interact reflect their beliefs and values and impacts their long term goals. Using their goals as benchmarks, Part II of this exercise gives staff the opportunity to identify ways goals are modeled and taught within the program/classroom (Wesley, Dennis and Tyndall, 1997).

Purpose of Part II:

- ★ To provide staff time to determine how they are currently structuring their setting and aligning their program practices to reflect their long- term goals for children.
- ★ To give staff an opportunity to identify areas that support these outcomes and areas where changes or modifications need to be made.

Materials Needed:

- ★ Blank *Our Goals for Children* template page
- ★ Pencil/pen

Directions:

1. Staff can begin by selecting one of the goals to look at how it is "taught" within the program. For example, if one of the long-term goals is respect, staff can use the template provided to examine how this goal is practiced within the program. Specifically:
    1. If we want children to be respectful what would educators be doing ?
    2. What would your early care environment look like that promotes respect?
    3. And what skills would children be developing that demonstrate respect ?
2. In developing or reevaluating programs, this process can be used for all the "shared goals" to identify behaviors, structures and practices within programs.
3. By using this information, program staff can identify how their program supports or detracts from their basic values and goals. Additionally, it will clarify what they can begin doing to provide positive supports.

Activity adapted from Kohn, A. (1995). Choosing Community: Classroom strategies for learning and caring: Tape A. Port Chester NY: National Professional Resources, Inc.

Our Goals for Children

Our Long Term goals are:	To promote our goals, educators would be doing:	Our early care environment would look like:	And children would be learning the skills to:

An Assessment Strategy:
The Child, The Program

The assessment phase is a component of positive supports. Gathering information about the individual as well as, the program and the people caring for and educating a child helps the team design appropriate supports. Learning to ask good questions is a critical skill for early care professionals, which can lead the team to abundant, useful information about the child. Doing regular, on-going observation is another essential skill. There are many ways to observe young children. Early care educators can observe and record through anecdotal recordings (note taking, journals, and logs), direct observation using checklists or compiling assessment information and developing individual portfolios.

Following are some examples of questions, which can help to guide the assessment process.

- What are the child's strengths, temperament, gifts, and talents?
- What are his/her needs?
- With whom does he prefer to play?
- How does the child enter into play with others?
- What play materials does the child typically use? How does he use them?
- What roles does the child take on: leader? follower?
- How long does the play interaction usually last? What happens next?
- How does he communicate?
- Which activities capture his fancy?
- Is there a particular staff person this child has a caring relationship with?
- Are there particular areas in the program that this child has difficulty in?
- How does he manage transitions?
- How does he handle conflict with another child?

After recording the individual assessment information, look at the individual in the context of the program (Donnellan, Mirenda, Mesaros & Fassbender 1984).

Below are some questions the early educator might ask:

- What are the physiological factors that affect this child?
- How does the classroom environment (physical) impact this child?
- Is the curriculum and instruction in this classroom attuned to the child's learning style, skill level, interests, etc?
- Are there family/home factors/changes that are having an impact on the child?
- Of what quality are the child's relationships? (Adapted Donnellan, et al. 1984)

Although the factors are listed separately, there is actually a dynamic interplay between each and the child, i.e., the child's physiological status impacts the way he responds to the classroom environment which affects the types of curriculum and instruction that are most effective and/or impacts relationships in both the home and school setting (Thelen & Smith, 1995).

Again, answering these assessment questions will direct the next steps in developing the supports necessary to address the implied need. If, for example, a child has sensory issues (physiological factor) and is very reactive to touch, the educators may want to consider how to protect him during circle time (curriculum) or explain to other children how to approach him or her (relationships). This example also serves to demonstrate the importance of focusing on the things in the child's environment that the educator *can* change (i.e., curriculum and his own practice) and not reacting to or punishing the child for exhibiting behaviors that may be beyond her control (i.e., neurological conditions that cause sensory defensiveness).

- Using the template provided, staff can examine how the physiological, environmental, and interpersonal factors effect the behavior of a particular child within their program.
- Using this information, the team can then identify the supports needed to assist this child

Assessment Planning

The Child, The Program, The Plan

Who is? (Use the questions from the Assessment Strategy):	
What are the physiological factors that affect this child?	How does the classroom physical environment impact this child?
Are the curriculum and instruction attuned to this child's learning style, skill level, interests?	Are there family/home factors, or changes that are having an impact on this child?
What are the child's relationships? Of what quality are they?	
Using this information, what supports can be included to assist this child? What skills must be taught? What adaptations should be made in the curriculum, instruction, assessment?	

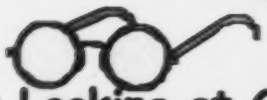
A Team Approach to Developing Specific Strategies

Because children are all different, ever-changing, and therefore impossible to typify, there cannot be one preferred way to work with every child. In fact, often, as many parents learn in raising their children: "Just when you think you know what you're doing, everything falls apart." Positive supports therefore, offers a cycle of on-going observation, adaptation, reflection, and refinement as a more reality-based way of thinking about children with challenging behavior (O'Brien & Lovett, 1993).

For example, in a nutshell the process might look something like this:

1. Assemble a team of individuals who know and care about the child and his/her family (including the parents, of course).
2. Discuss the assessment questions.
3. Based on the team's understanding of the child, arrive at a hypothesis of what the message might be in the child's behavior.
4. Determine a support that meets the child's implied need. (The team's best guess, based on everything they know about the child)
5. Try out the support with the child.
   - ★ Reflect as a team. Did the support work? Why or why not? What else might need to be done? Where do we go from here?
   - ★ Adjust the support or try another.
   - ★ Revisit steps 3 to 5 as often as needed.

Shifting the Focus:



A Strategy for Looking at Challenging Behavior Another Way

It is important for early educators to understand the difference between what they can or should control and what they cannot or have limited control over. They must "play on the strings they have." When educators focus on those domains over which they exercise some control, they are free to direct their considerable energies toward the areas where they can actually make a difference for children. In order to do this, they must shift their thinking away from fixing the child to considerations of adapting or changing aspects of the child's environment (Dodge & Colker, 1996).

The following chart is designed to provoke thought and discussion among early educators. It can be especially helpful when staff are feeling frustrated about a child's behavior. A discussion focusing on the areas over which staff may exercise greater control, such as curriculum, instruction, assessment, and the physical environment, may assist the team in moving forward.

Shifting the Focus:

A Chart for Looking at Challenging Behaviors Another Way

Challenging Behavior	Likely Causes/ Possible Unmet Needs	Possible Solutions: (List the things educators can do in the physical environment to assist.)	Possible Solutions: (List the things educators can do within the curriculum and in the ways they teach and model to assist)
An example: **Not Sharing**	❁ *Developmental age* ❁ *Too many children* ❁ *Not enough of the same toy* ❁ *Not enough interesting things to do*	❁ *Arrange space for smaller groups* ❁ *Provide duplicate toys* ❁ *Expand on the activity to provide more complex or interesting "takes" on the game.*	❁ *Teach children sharing skills* ❁ *Provide timer to show children when they will have a turn* ❁ *Model different ways to use materials and toys*

Strategies for Reducing Stress in Young Children

Stress is a common feature of the lives of young children today. Divorce, changing family patterns, noise, pollution, violence, and poverty are just a few of the many stressors that can affect a child's quality of life. Combining these factors with the normal pressures associated with growth and development, can produce a very stressful life experience for young children. Clearly young children must learn the skills that will assist them in coping with the pressures of life that will inevitably come their way. The most effective way to do this is to embed stress management and relaxation techniques into the daily classroom curriculum. Doing this will increase the likelihood that a child will generalize what she is learning into new contexts and other settings. A curriculum goal might include teaching young children about what stress is, what it feels like, and what some of the causes might be. This could be accomplished by having a discussion during circle time or during lunch or following a stressful event. Helping children to identify, label, and recognize feelings in themselves and others is an essential first step. Once they can do this, they are ready to learn how they can self-regulate/calm down when they are feeling "stressed out."

Following are a few suggestions for teaching young children how to relax as described by Lang and Stinson, 1991; Edwards and Hofmeier, 1991):

- ★ Rock, hold, and sing to babies and toddlers.
- ★ Put on soft background music.
- ★ Play Simon Says with the teacher acting as Simon and slowing down the movements.
- ★ Talk about how you relax when you are feeling anxious. Model this within the classroom.
- ★ Turn down the lights or start talking very slowly or softly.
- ★ Use progressive relaxation. Teach children how to tense and relax difference parts of their bodies, taking care that children do not tense a body part for too long. Start with toes and go up to the face.

- ★ Help children identify their own good qualities and remind them to use positive affirmations
- ★ Teach stretching exercises by associating various postures with animals. (Ex., children clasp their hands together and stretch arms in the air: they are giraffes with long necks.)
- ★ Teach children how to breathe slowly and from the stomach.
- ★ Guided imagery. This can be done almost anywhere but it is particularly helpful at naptime. Ask children to close their eyes. Soft music in the background can be used if desired. In a very soft and slow voice, describe a place where you have felt calm and relaxed. (At the beach; in the woods; in the bath tub; on a hammock) What does it look like? As you walk around (mentally), what do you see, hear, and smell? Are their others there? What are they doing?

These skills can be taught easily to most young children. Some children with special needs may take a longer period of time to learn the skills; may benefit more from shorter, more frequent instruction; or may need more direct one-on-one assistance.

Strategies for Helping Young Children with Transitions

Often challenging behaviors present when young children are required to make changes. Transitions are often "hot spots" (Education Development Center, 1997). To proactively plan for these times early educators can evaluate where, how and for what reasons they are asking children to move or change.

Here are some questions to ask:

1. When do transitions typically happen during your regular routine?
2. How many times are children expected to change activities, groups of friends, different caregivers?
3. Are all the transitions identified necessary?
4. What changes might you make to reduce the numbers of transitions children are expected to make?

When assessing how to positively support a particular child some particulars educators will want to consider are:

1. What transition does this child have the most difficulties with?
2. What are the reasons for this difficulty?
3. Does this child always have trouble with this transition or are there times when she can handle the change? If so, describe what happens.
4. What do the adults do to assist the child during this transition?
5. What are the results?
6. What other strategies might help this child manage the transition better?
7. How will you evaluate how these ideas are working?
8. What are your next steps?

Contingency Plans: A Strategy For When Things Fall Apart

Although positive supports provided effectively within the context of a developmentally appropriate program will go a long way in reducing the incidence of challenging behavior there may occasionally be an isolated event that threatens the classroom peace and safety. During these times it is more necessary than ever to assure that the values, beliefs, and practices that form the foundation for DAP as well as positive supports are upheld. Positive relationships form the basis for any intervention. This implies trust, honesty, and respect, with the adult modeling these characteristics.

The following considerations may provide general guidelines for developing a crisis strategy. *Each child should have an individualized plan* based on what her team knows about her and the relationships that exist within and outside of the early care program. The following are "general guidelines" to be used as a format for looking at a child who may be having particular difficulties and need some intervention because his/her behavior may pose a threat to herself or others in the program (Vandenberg, Donner, Grealish, Miles, Stieper, Franz, Brown, Lubrecht, Huff, & Reed, 1995; Education Development Center, 1997).

- ★ As a team, define "crisis." For what particular situations do you need a contingency plan or intervention strategy?
- ★ When a "crisis" situation arises, identify which staff member will go to the child having difficulty.
- ★ Identify which staff member will go to the other child or children.
- ★ Develop a list of possible strategies and approaches to supporting the child in crisis and strategies for supporting the other children in the program.
- ★ Identify ways that the staff can re-group, relax, and be ready to continue their work.

- Develop a protocol for who will be notified and in what time frame. Make sure that the person who needs this information has access to it at all times.
- Discuss how the team will know when the crisis is over.
- Discuss how the staff will debrief, review the situation, and revise the plan if needed. Including:

1. Establishing a rule that no major changes in the child's plan will be made within 72 hours of the crisis. This will prevent the team from overreacting.
2. Preplanning the above interventions by working with the staff who may be involved in resolving the crisis. This will help to establish the expectation that all involved will manage the crisis within the context of the child's plan with consideration to his/her positive supports and DAP, rather than abandoning it. This will also clarify the role of the staff persons involved.
3. Assessing the child's history regarding past crises so that the team can evaluate progress.
4. If the crisis has not passed within 72 hours, reviewing what the team currently understands about the child and consider revising the plan.

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